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Teachers call off strike after appeals, threats

AADITHYAN J P

The week-long strike by Government school teachers was called off on Wednesday following the appeal of several politicians and reportedly after threats of suspension and loss of pay.

The strike had been called by the Joint Action of Council of Tamil Nadu Teachers Organisation and Government Employees' Organisation in support of better pay among other things.

The New Indian Express quoted Meenakshisundaram, one of the State coordinators of the association, as saying "Respecting the sentiments of people and having students' welfare in our hearts, we have decided to end the strike."

Media reports said the Government had also threatened to appoint new teachers in place of those on strike and that following this warning many employees returned to work.

Renuka Lakshmi, a teacher at the Boys Higher Secondary School in Nandanam said, "All of our



Teachers at a rally in Nandanam | AADITHYAN J P

teachers have rejoined their posts, with most of them returning on Friday. Many teachers were absent from their posts but did not join the protest fearing the repercussions."

"What they have done to the primary level teachers is even worse as they have reduced their salaries. Keeping the matter of the students in mind the court asked the teachers to set aside the issue and

settle it after the exams get over," she added.

Selva Singh, a special educator for the differently abled, said, "We went on strike as we have been teaching for more than 20 years as part of the Tamil Nadu Government Education Department."

But, even after having a service record of more than two decades, some teachers still had not received

any appointment orders, he said. Additionally, the teachers took care of over 1,50,000 children who suffer from mental retardation, visual and hearing impairment, and were orthopedically challenged.

"Even though the government provides all the equipment and funding we are the mediators who put them to use, and we are still being paid only Rs 14,000 per month," he added.

Laxman, a teacher at a Government Higher Secondary School in Nandanam, said "I see my students as my own children, and this is why I have chosen not to go on strike as it will affect their studies. Even though I have two children of my own, I did what I thought was right for all of us."

Besides improved salaries, teachers demanded benefits under the GPF (General Provident Fund) instead of the current CPF (Contributory Provident Fund). "This would help as we wouldn't have to keep losing a chunk of our salary every month and we'd get assured pension just like it was before," Laxman added.

ANAND J C

Individuals who earn up to Rs 5 lakh have been exempted from paying income tax in the interim budget proposal presented by Finance Minister Piyush Goyal in the Lok Sabha on February 1.

In what is seen as another sop in the run-up to the General Elections expected in April-May, Goyal announced that interest income on bank deposits of up to Rs 40,000 wouldn't be taxed. The limit was Rs 10,000 earlier.

The standard deduction will be raised from Rs 40,000 to Rs 50,000 for the salaried class.

The gratuity payment limit has been increased to Rs 20 lakh from Rs 10 lakh.

The assessment and verification of IT returns would be completed digitally in 24 hours, Goyal said.

Turning to the rural sector, Goyal announced the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PMKSN) for more than 12,000 small and marginal farmers. Farmers with land under two hectares will get Rs 6,000 transferred directly into their

bank accounts in three separate instalments every year. A sum of Rs 75,000 crore will be allocated every year, starting April 2019.

Goyal said the scheme would be implemented retrospectively, starting from December 1, 2018 and that Rs 20,000 crore has been allocated for the current financial year for this purpose. The first instalment will be disbursed before the elections.

Pradhan Mantri Shram Yogi Maandhaan scheme was announced for workers who earn less than Rs 15,000 a month in the unorganised sector. These workers will get a pension of Rs 3,000 a month after they turn 60.

Goyal claimed that under the BJP-led NDA regime direct tax collection had risen from Rs 6.38 lakh crore in 2013-14 to almost Rs 12 lakh crore now. Goyal credited the demonetization scheme for this rise. "Rs 1.3 lakh crore of undisclosed income came to the system due to demonetization," Goyal said.

More than Rs 3 lakh crore has been allocated for Defence. The

much delayed '1 rank 1 pension' scheme had been implemented by the Modi Government and more than Rs 35,000 crore had been disbursed, he said.

Goyal claimed that India was constructing at least 27 km of roads every day. "We are the fastest highway developers in the world," he said and added that Rs 19,000 crore had been allocated to Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana.

"We have restored the image of the country, India is back on track," Goyal said, pointing to the inflation rate under NDA had fallen to 4.6 per cent as compared to 10.1 recorded under the UPA regime.

BJP President Amit Shah said, "The budget has met the expectations of farmers, labourers and the middle class."

However, Congress leader Sashi Tharoor questioned if PMKSN was good enough. "Rs 6,000 in income support for farmers boils down to Rs 500 per month. Is that supposed to enable them to live with the honour and dignity? The whole (budget) exercise has turned out to be a damp squib," he said.

Chennai faces water shortage this summer

AKSHARA SRIVASTAVA

Come summer 2019, Chennai will be facing a severe water shortage. Rainfall wasn't satisfactory last year and the levels in the four reservoirs that feed Chennai are going down and are now well below their storage capacity.

However, rainwater harvesting has helped to some extent in saving groundwater in some areas, even though the water tables have gone down in many places.

Sekhar Raghavan, founder of the Rain Centre, said rainwater harvesting was not a complicated engineering process but a simple mechanism for saving water.

The mechanism included connecting the rooftop to underground recharge wells, an underground tank, often called a sump, or an open well through pipes that are fitted with filters.

Some residents in Gandhi Nagar have installed a basic water harvesting system in their homes.

"We have a recharge well, and a water sump underground, where all water from the rooftop is collected. The system works well and wasn't too expensive. We spent only Rs 3500 on its construction," said Nagarajan, who lives on 3rd Cross street, Gandhi Nagar.

Sekhar said, "The government is not for the people. They want to come in as messiah at the last minute. People should start taking matters into their own hands and build proper harvesting systems in their homes."

Inadequate water supply in localities all over Chennai is becoming an issue as temperature continues to rise.

Residents of T. Nagar erupted in protest and refused to vote if Metro Water doesn't supply water on time.

Residents of Pallavaram also complained of improper water supply, due to which they had to travel around two km to fetch water.

The Chennai Metro Water Board (CMWB) was sourcing water from farmer wells in Tiruvallur to provide drinking water in Chennai, said a report in Dina Thanthi, a local newspaper in Chennai.

When asked about the arrangements done for water supply, CMWB officials refused to comment. The official website of Chennai Metropolitan Water Supply and Sewerage Board (CMWSSB) paints a harrowing picture.

The Poondi tank which has a capacity of 3231 million cubic feet (mcf) has just 204 mcf. Storage last year around the same time was 1310 mcf.

The Cholavaram tank with a capacity of 1081 mcf now has 48 mcf. At this time last year, storage was 459 mcf.

The Red Hills tank has a capacity of 3300 mcf and now has 748 mcf. Storage last year during this time was 1396 mcf.

The Chembarambakkam tank has a capacity of 7612 mcf but now has only 1000 mcf. Last year at this time, the storage was 3165 mcf.

Taps dry, water sells in bottles

ANSHITA BHATT

Some 20 days ago, workers from a mobile phone company dug up Sarojini Street in Pallavaram to lay cables, and damaged the only water supply line. But residents claim that they have not been receiving proper water supply for the past 20 years now.

Of the two water supply lines running in the place, the Metro Water line has not started functioning while the other line supplies water from the Palar river once a week; but this is irregular and inadequate, say the residents.

"We have to pay for our daily supply of water," says Sabrimani (44), who has been living in the area for the past five years.

K. Rubiya, another resident says, "A public tap near the next railway station, Chrompet, supplies water all around. But we have to walk 20 minutes to get our buckets filled."

Those who cannot walk daily pay for the water. Narayanan from the neighbouring Pallavan Colony says, "One fellow fetches water for us and charges Rs 10 per pail (18 litres) for labour. It is Rs 12 to take the pail to the second floor."

Anthony Pious from Sarojini Street pays Rs 40 for his weekly fill. "People are supposed to get the Palar water through taps, but our taps run dry because people use motorized pumps to suck up all the water," he says.

Narayanan has not installed motor. Pointing at the unpacked box lying near a wall in his house, he says, "I can be selfish and flout the rules, but I respect the sentiments of people."

Most houses have either a well or borewell. "When the groundwater is recharged during the monsoon, we get water



Water supply on Sarojini Street was disrupted after the road was dug up to lay cables for a mobile phone company. | ANSHITA BHATT

through our well," says Tilakavati from Pallavan Colony. "At other times, we buy water. Some buy can water. People have been buying water for many years."

The water shortage is acute from April to July. "During these months, we have to call for lorry water every five days," adds Narayanan. A tanker load is shared by six families in the building. "The cost varies from Rs 1,800 to 2,500 as per the demand."

The problem is severe in Bharathi Nagar, which is about a kilometer away from Sarojini Street. "People have drums lined outside their houses and wait for tankers to supply them with water because they have no other source," says Narayanan.

"Amidst this scarcity, bottled water is sold here at Rs 30. How can there be

abundant mineral water in shops but no drinking water in homes," exclaims Narayanan.

Silvia Varghese from Sarojini Street says "We pay water tax regularly, but pay extra for a basic necessity. We've complained to the Pallavaram Municipality several times, but no one resolves the issue."

Paneerselvam, Assistant Director of Water Supply at Pallavaram Municipality, says the problem will be resolved in two days.

Darwin Thangamani, a resident of Sarojini Street, says "Funds have been released from the state government to the Pallavaram Municipality but money does not trickle down. We have filed several RTIs but haven't received a single response."

E-toilets unkempt, Corp disagrees

AISHANI SAHA

E-toilets installed in front of one of Chennai's largest shopping malls, Phoenix Marketcity, are in poor condition.

According to the Eram Scientific Solution company which makes e-toilets, the door of an e-toilet opens only when a Re 1 coin is inserted.

The lights switch on automatically, saving power. But in these e-toilets the doors were open all the time with no electricity and the machines where the user has to put a coin in, were broken.

Auto driver P. Ramesh said, "The taps have run out of water and the flush doesn't work. There is a stench all around the place because of the toilet." The toilets which are programmed to clean the commode with a wash-down after use by five people, was covered with faeces, plastic packets and bottles.

The e-toilets are also supposed to be equipped with machines for disposal of sanitary napkins; but they were missing in one of the e-toilets. Zubin Das (27), one of the security guards of market city said, "Nobody uses these toilets; they have to just use the ones in the mall. These toilets have remained

unused for months."

The e-toilet opposite the office of Greater Chennai Corporation on Velachery Main Road in Lakshmi Puram is in better condition. The sanitary napkin disposal machine works and the toilets are cleaner.

Chandrasekhar Mahadeo (41), who owns a pharmacy shop nearby said, "Passersby sometimes use it but more often it is used by drug addicts at night to take drugs and alcohol." He said that the Corporation sent people to check the toilets once in two months, but they did not clean them.

However, R. Devadas, Assistant Executive Engineer of the Greater Chennai Corporation, Velachery said, "The three e-toilets that fall under our jurisdiction are maintained properly; once in a week a corporation worker checks the toilet."

"E-toilets are better than normal toilets because the maintenance is cheaper, and there is water supply throughout the day," he added.

When asked about the difficulty faced by a user who is not up to date with the modern technology he said, "The instructions to use the toilets are on the door in Tamil, Hindi and English. It is easy for everyone to read."

Flowers bloom in banned plastic bottles at MMC

AINDRISHA MITRA

Madras Medical College's (MMC) Eco-club is battling pollution in a unique way - by building vertical gardens with used plastic bottles.

These bottles were filled with soil and manure and saplings were planted in them. The bottles were then coloured and were either attached to bamboo and wooden structures or hung with ropes, said Dr. Sudharshini Subramaniam, Assistant Professor of Community Medicine.

Dr. Subramaniam who supervises students' activities in the eco-club said that in the first month, the students collected about 10 kg of disposed plastic bottles, sachets and pouches.

"The labels of several soft drinks bottles have been kept deliberately to address that something productive has been carved out of a plastic waste," said Dr. Subramaniam.

Formed in 2016 with the motto of keeping the college campus litter-free, MMC's Eco-Club came up with an initiative called "Plogging - Jogging

with picking up trash." The students collected plastic in the area and processed it to build their first vertical garden after 44 hours in 37 days of rigorous effort.

The vertical garden project started last year on June 5, on the World Environment Day.

Faculty, students and staff of MMC and Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital (RGGGH) participated in a rally in the hospital premises with the message of banning plastic. The first step was taken by replacing the plastic items used in canteens



Reduce, Reuse, Recycle done right! | AINDRISHA M

The idea of vertical gardening sprung from the event and was finally implemented from August to December.

Ramamoorthy, a pre-final year student and the Secretary of MMC Eco-club said that the walls in

and eateries with bio-friendly alternatives like banana leaves, stainless steel and thonnai (bowl made out of dry leaves).

With "Beat plastic pollution" as the theme in 2018, MMC also organised competitions in which students were allotted a plot of land and asked to make good use of it.

The campus had been utilised for building two vertical gardens while one garden had been made inside the GH.

"It consumes less space and is a hassle-free method which also beautifies the campus," said Ramamoorthy, referring to the wide varieties of flowers and plant saplings used in the garden.

According to Dr. Subramaniam, social media has been important for propagating MMC's initiative. The activities of vertical gardening posted on Facebook and WhatsApp garnered more support, particularly from the freshers as well as other private organisations which came forward to donate plant saplings, she said.

Prof. R. Jayanthi, Dean of MMC and RGGGH said the Eco-club's activities would be expanded by introducing projects on bio-degradable waste management to raise awareness and engage students in more environment-related activities. "In times of climate change, these measures are imperative to ensure that our hospitals are converted into 100 per cent pollution-free zones," she said.

CHENNAI GETTING USED TO PLASTIC BAN

People, shops finding alternatives

ANAND J C

People in Chennai are getting used to the ban on single-use plastics imposed by the Tamil Nadu State Government from January 1, 2019.

The government banned items like plastic cups, plastic sheets, plastic flags, plastic plates and other plastic items which are of 'use and throw' nature.

People and shops are finding alternatives to carry their purchases and other things.

Many supermarkets in the city are offering cloth bags to their customers. "Customers normally paid three or six rupees for a plastic bag to carry their purchases. Because of the ban, we are offering cloth bags, for Rs. 15. Many people buy the cloth bag but I see a lot of customers bringing their own bags," said a supermarket manager in Adyar.

Supermarkets across Adyar and Nungambakkam are charging Rs. 15-20 for a cloth bag.

"I don't mind paying the extra money for the cloth bags, as a citizen I need to be aware of what

BANNED

* Plastic sheet/cling film used for food wrapping

* Plastic/Thermocol plates, cups

* Water pouches, packets

* Plastic/Thermocol tumblers

* Plastic straws

* Plastic carry bags

* Plastic flags

Cloth/Paper/Jute bags ✓

Paper straws ✓

Glass/Metal tumblers ✓

Lotus leaves ✓

Paper rolls ✓

Plantain leaves, Areca nut ✓

leaves, aluminum foils ✓

ALTERNATIVES

| ASHMITA MUKHERJEE

is good and bad. I appreciate this initiative," said Sadipto Das, a student from IIT Madras said. "They (the government) do need to work on providing us with affordable alternatives," he added. Shops have stopped selling

plastic and thermocol plates, cups and glasses. Instead, they are offering plates and cups made of bagasse and areca leaves.

Bagasse plates cost Rs. 10 a piece and areca leaves plates cost Rs. 7 a piece. The banned varieties

cost Rs. 2 a plate making the available alternatives costlier.

But customers aren't protesting.

"I haven't faced any problems at all. The customers are not averse to buying eco-friendly products.

Business has, of course, slowed down this month, but I believe in the long run it is a good

decision," said R. Ramalingam, owner of a shop that sells disposable party products.

"Hoteliers are a bit hesitant as the extra prices tend to drive away the customers," he added. Another shopkeeper selling

plastic items in Adyar said business had slowed down. "Alternative choices aren't cheap. Mostly people buy in bulk so the cost becomes even higher."

However, plastic traders in the state do not agree with the ban and are in no mood to take it lying down. "There are more than one lakh people employed in the plastic industry in the city itself. The condition is very bad," said Ibrahim, a member of the All India Plastic Manufacturers' Association.

"Our colleagues at TAPMA (Tamil Nadu Plastic Manufacturers' Association) are currently at the High Court looking after the issue."

A similar ban had been imposed in 2002 by the then Jayalalithaa Government but was overturned eventually after stiff opposition from the TAPMA.

Lawyers representing TAPMA argued that under the Environment (Protection) Act of 1986, only the Centre had the powers to ban plastic, not the State Government, The Hindu reported.

AISHWARYAAR

Plastic banners and hoardings continue to be used in Tamil Nadu which has banned "single-use" plastic material.

Around 45 kg of plastic waste is disposed from the Chennai Trade Centre at Nandambakkam after every event.

The disposal work is outsourced to a private company which clears the exhibit area and collect all the banners, pamphlets, posters and catalogues. The waste is then allegedly dumped in the nearby Corporation bin or dump yard.

M. Prakash, marketing head at the Chennai Trade Centre said "We have no idea where the waste goes, never mind what happens to it. We want the venue cleared and that is our main priority."

The Government banned 14 single-use plastic items including food packaging plastics. But banners and posters were excluded from the list.

Of the 802 books stalls in the

Chennai Book fair in Y.M.C.A., only one stall had fabric partitions and most of the others were made of plastic.

Madhusudan Reddy, Deputy Commissioner for Health, Greater Chennai Corporation, said "The thin plastic items such as polythene bags are shredded and reused in the corporation dump yards such as Kodungaoyur and Koyembedu. The other hard plastics are sent to cement factories to be burnt as fuels."

"Segregation done at the source level would be ideal, but since that is not implemented 100 per cent, it is done by rag pickers and scrap collectors."

Veeramani (48) is a ragpicker who collects plastic and metal waste from Kathipara to Guindy Industrial estate.

"There are hills of waste accumulated near the major industrial companies. Banners and pamphlets are also a major part as they sell for a better price than regular plastic covers and food packets at the scrap dealers' market."

Banners live on

Metro construction puts shops in a rut

ASHITHA JAYPRKASH

Age-old businesses on General Patters Road have taken a hit ever since the four lane stretch of the bustling Anna Salai was reduced to a one-way road in 2012 for underground metro rail construction.

Offices on the affected stretch of Anna Salai started using the rear side located on GP Road adding to the traffic.

"Business is dull, it has been ever since they started this metro construction work," said Chinmaswamy, owner of a modest tea shop.

Most of the businesses are automobile spare parts shops and a couple of restaurants. The auto dealers say they have lost parking space which has affected many

“First we get affected by this never ending metro construction work and now we have to face these rowdies who take away our business

- PRASHANT

OWNER OF AN AUTO DEALERSHIP

businesses on the lane. "Even if potential customers come to these shops, the cops in the vicinity will penalize them for parking even for 2 seconds. So the new customers would go to the service providers in Anna Nagar, T

Nagar or OMR," Said Bunty, an auto dealer on GP Road.

The government responded to their grievances about parking space by asking them to shift the shops until the metro work was complete.

"I've been here since 1952, like the other shops, where will we move to? We'll have to generate new business all over again," he said while explaining why shifting wasn't a plausible option.

"Every time they say they have completed the work, they will come back two or three months later and restart, that itself has been going on for 3 years now," he added.

Then there is the rising number of brokers who take away their already affected business, a group of auto dealers raises their voice

against this issue.

"First we get affected by this never ending metro construction work and now we have to face these rowdies who take away our business," said Prashant, owner of an over 60 year old auto dealer establishment.

"The turf war sometimes gets physical," he said, but they don't prefer it. "It is such a big trouble for us because the police are with them." An association of dealers have filed a written complaint against the brokers' torment with the commissioner of police, Chennai.

A visibly annoyed Prashant said "There are around 150 brokers here. They take the customers to a rowdy who then directs them to other shops. These shops are able to pay a very high commission to

these brokers because they fleece the customers. And because of this; the reputation of the establishments here is getting tarnished."

On how LIC staff was impacted by the 7-year-old construction work, an LIC employee, Lokesh, has a contrasting story.

"This is for the makkal [people]. A facility that will benefit all of us in the future," he diverted that the construction hadn't adversely affected the company as customers earlier had to take a U-turn at the intersection of Anna Salai anyway. But now they'd be diverted to GP Road and take the building's back entrance.

According to a Hindu article dated November 27, 2012, the underground metro rail construction was expected to be completed in 2015.

Bus terminus in an abysmal state

ASHMITA MUKHERJEE

Commuters express discontentment with the poor state of maintenance of Thiruvanniyur Bus Terminal and T. Nagar Bus Terminus. Both these depots according to passengers have ill-kept or no toilets, inconvenient drinking water facilities and damaged roads.

The number of passengers has risen significantly over the past few years. Therefore currently according to official records, T. Nagar Bus Terminal conducts 1,900 trips every day, with 72 MTC buses commuting from the T. Nagar terminus to rest of the city and over a 100 incoming buses from other locations.

With the increased number of commuters, existing facilities are failing to serve the public. A MTC staff who wished to remain anonymous said, "T. Nagar Bus Terminus has no toilet. Near the entrance, where there is a garbage dump, the wall next to it has been transformed into a makeshift toilet by people urinating onto it. People here litter all the time. No steps have been taken to maintain the terminus

“People here litter all the time. No steps have been taken to maintain the terminus

- AISHWARYA DUGAR, STUDENT AND FREQUENT COMMUTER

pregnant women struggle to reach the bus before it leaves. We are therefore forced to stand in the sun at the main gate so as not to miss the ride."

Aishwarya Dugar, a student and frequent commuter said, "The ground is at a very low level especially at the gate. So even with light showers the area floods heavily. The toilets have no upkeep and are dirty. There is a drinking water tap but it is far from the terminus. Men urinate on the walled areas away from the parking space. The stench is unbearable."

An elderly resident who wished to remain anonymous said, "About two weeks ago an aged man fainted while waiting for the bus. The MTC staff did not come to his rescue. Students from a nearby school who were travelling for an

excursion trip rushed him to a hospital. The staff turned a blind eye to the entire incident."

Ravichandran K., superintendent of Industrial Relations' division of MTC said, "The onus of maintenance falls upon Greater Chennai Corporation. We are fully controlled by the Corporation. We only manage the vehicles as operators. Any complaint we receive from the public, we forward it to the Corporation." Branch manager at Thiruvanniyur Bus Terminal was not available and branch manager at T. Nagar Bus Terminus declined to comment stating that he was not at liberty to comment without permission from MTC.

Pondy Bazaar soon a pedestrian plaza

AKSHARA SRIVASTAVA

Pondy Bazaar in T. Nagar, a shopper's paradise, will soon be turned into a pedestrian plaza and Sir Thyagaraya Street, a 66 metre stretch, will be converted into a one-way street.

Entry of all motor vehicles, barring buses will be restricted in the area once the plan is implemented. The current 250 parking slots on the main street will be shifted to the side streets, where around 500 parking spots have been identified by the Corporation.

Pedestrians in the market had a mixed response to the move.

"It is a good move, as it will make shopping easier, with no fear of traffic," said Prem Kumar, a frequent visitor to the area.

When asked about the mode of

transportation he uses, he said, "I come in my car, but park it half a kilometre away, as the street is always very crowded."

Namya, another frequent visitor however felt that it was a difficult and unnecessary plan to implement. "Cars are a comfortable way of travelling. We park them here, and make multiple trips without carrying the heavy bags around. With the new plan, it will become difficult to shop, as we will be forced to carry the bags around."

Shop owners feared that their businesses would be affected. "No cars, no crowd, no business," said a hawker selling handkerchiefs when asked about the plan.

Javed Ahmed, owner of a footwear shop, said, "They (the Corporation) should focus on

repairing the pavement first instead of coming up with new plans. The plan will affect our business, as people won't come to shop if they have to park their cars far away. They will prefer to shop in other places, where cars are allowed."

Construction work has left the footpath broken and rocky making it difficult for pedestrians to walk freely.

Rajiv, a trinket seller on the footpath, appreciated the move but wished that the path would be made even soon, to facilitate his business.

"There have been many accidents due to heavy traffic and now the construction work. The uneven path causes many people to fall, hopefully the plan will put an end to those," he said.



Construction ongoing at Pondy Bazaar | AKSHARA SRIVASTAVA

However, N. Muthuraman, a traffic police inspector in the area denied that there were accidents involving cars and pedestrians, but added that the move will facilitate the free flow of traffic.

An official in the Greater Chennai Corporation said the project was a part of the Smart City Project started by the Greater Chennai Corporation and was set to be launched by April.

BUCKINGHAM CANAL CHOKES ON SEWAGE AND PLASTIC

ANKITA MARWAHA

The Buckingham Canal remains choked with sewage, muck, water hyacinth, and plastic bottles and wrappers and repeated complaints have been in vain.

The 796-km long canal flowing from Andhra Pradesh to Tamil Nadu, has been reduced to a stagnant drain in Chennai because of the pollution from industries and sewage pipes, and structures encroaching on it.

"People used to travel on boats on the canal in the 1940s to Adyar to sell vegetables," recalled Valli (70), who was born in Indira Nagar and has been living there since.

"The trading stopped in 1950s-60s due to public encroachment and dumping of [solid] waste, which created blocks at certain points," said G. Venkateshan (75), a resident of Kasturba Nagar.

According to a report by The Hindu multiple private sewage pipes have been found discharging waste into the canal.

"There is always a foul smell and the open stagnant canal has become a breeding ground for mosquitos, often causing fever among the residents," said Venkateshan. "The government comes only after rainy season to spray mosquito-repellent," he added. Dhanalaxmi, who lives near Light House, said "The Corporation van comes to collect garbage from our locality every day. However, people continue to spit and throw garbage in the canal." On the Chepauk and Tiruvanniyur stretch of the canal, the Chennai MRTS acquired the land and built the overhead railway tracks above the canal route.

"The government never dealt with the land acquired to build the



Plastic and filth floats on a stretch of the canal | ANKITA MARWAHA

MRTS. Since the stations and the rail tracks were built, the condition of the canal has only degraded,"

said Vidhya Mohankumar, Project Lead of the Buckingham Canal restoration project under Eyes On

The Canal and Urban Design Collective. Working on the Kotturpuram

MRTS station-Tiruvanniyur MRTS station stretch, Eyes On The Canal (EOTC) has been organizing community integration and awareness programmes since May 2018. "The public needs to stand up and claim ownership of the canal that passes by their neighbourhood," she added.

The EOTC has organised an open-ideas competition, inviting people to offer ideas to revive the canal. The winners of the competition will finalise their proposal by March.

"We're hoping this proposal can be absorbed in the government's restoration plan or pose as an alternative. We've already met to all the necessary agencies and multiple stakeholders involved," said Vidhya.

"We're still waiting for the government to release its plan. They say that they are almost

finished, but they haven't released any details in the public domain yet," she added. Seven government departments are involved in the planning and implementation of the schemes to restore the Coum and the Adyar rivers, and the Buckingham Canal. The Greater Chennai Corporation is responsible for solid waste removal, Public Works Department for desilting and demarcation, and Chennai Rivers Restoration Trust (CRRT) for monitoring the whole project. The Central Government had announced a Rs. 2,000-crore plan in 2016 for the rejuvenation of the 1,095-kilometer canal.

"We've started with the restoration of the two rivers, but our team is currently working on the canal's restoration report. It will be out in two months," said Mr. Vishwanathan of the CRRT office.

Workers choke on dust

ABHINAYA HARIGOVIND

People working in leather buffing units are prone to developing breathing difficulties and skin rashes, according to doctors and workers.

Balan, a 38-year-old worker who smoothens goat hide to make suede leather, is covered from head to toe in a fine, bluish-white dust. He finds it difficult to breathe sometimes and has a skin allergy that leaves rashes on his arms.

Balan is one of five workers at a 'buffing' unit in Nagalkeni, Chromepet. The buffing machine he works at is fitted with a cylinder and sand paper that removes the rough, top surface of the hide to leave behind the inner layer that gives suede its velvety feel.

Hide is tanned with chromium (III) sulphate to make a moist, light blue sheet called wet blue which is dried and fed into the buffing machine to make suede.

According to Uday Kumar, President of the Pallavaram Tanneries Association, the 120 tanneries in the Pallavaram-Chromepet area do not have the Pollution Control Board's permission to make wet blue since chromium can contaminate the water and cause health problems in nearby residential areas. The wet blue is supplied from Vellore.

"There are around 50 small buffing units in and around the Chromepet area," said Uday



Balan, who works at a buffing unit in Nagalkeni, is covered in dust and says he finds it difficult to breathe. | ABHINAYA

Kumar. "Tanneries that do not have their own buffing machines, buy sheets of leather from the small buffing units and colour them to produce finished suede."

Raghu Jagadeesh (42) has been working at a buffing unit on Thiruneealmal Main Road in Nagalkeni since he was 12 years old. He recently started developing breathing trouble and rashes on his arms. "The effect of the dust has only started showing now. I had no problems when I was younger," he said.

He now works with a handkerchief wrapped around his nose and mouth.

"We have tried using the green disposable masks. But that does not filter the dust. It is everywhere," he said.

Idris Seth, technical officer at the National Institute of Occupational Health, Ahmedabad, said, "Inhaling dust containing particles of chromium III is not dangerous if the exposure is only for a short duration. Prolonged exposure, particularly if they are working in closed spaces, can cause allergies and respiratory problems."

Buffing units have small rooms with little ventilation and workers operate the machine from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

According to H B Chandrashekar, chief of pulmonology at Columbia Asia Hospital, Bangalore, "Inhalation of dust that contains inorganic materials like pigments can cause asthma and its symptoms of cough, breathlessness and wheezing. It can also cause hypersensitive pneumonitis (lung inflammation)."

Big tanneries and leather exporters have done away with small buffing machines that process one small sheet of leather at a time.

"We have a 'through-feed' machine for buffing," said Saif Ahmed, owner of Jahan Leather Exports in Nagalkeni.

"It can process large sheets of leather at once and removes the dust by itself without the workers having to touch the dust. The machine is also connected to a chimney that collects and removes the dust." This machine was imported from Italy.

"Smaller units cannot afford the machine," said K Shivraj, who owns and works at a small buffing unit. "A small buffing machine with a single cylinder costs Rs 1, 75, 000. The ones with a big cylinder that can process bigger sheets of leather can cost around Rs 6 lakhs or even more if they are imported."

"The smaller units also employ more people. The big machines need only two people to operate them," he said.



Kanthamma (left) takes the new red bus since other buses are congested. | AISHWARYAA

No buses for 'disabled'

AISHWARYAA R

Commuting on the Metropolitan Transport Corporation buses is very difficult for differently-abled passengers, says a representative of these people.

"The visually challenged are not guided. The physically challenged do not have proper space to sit. The mentally challenged are not even provided a seat," said Mary, Public Relations Officer at the Federation of Tamil Nadu Physically Handicapped Association.

"What is worse is, sometimes they cannot even sit in the assigned seat, since it is occupied by others who refuse to get up. Conductors are not very vigilant or strict with these issues," said Mary.

Shameena Begum (38) takes her 12-year-old daughter to the Bala Vihar School for the Mentally Challenged in Kilpauk from her residence in Nungambakkam, every day by bus.

Shameena works at a tailoring shop in T. Nagar and earns Rs. 6500 a month. Her husband works as a driver and earns Rs.10,000 a month.

"We can only afford to take the bus as her father doesn't own any

vehicle. I need to carry her on my waist as she can't walk, and on top of that I need to climb those huge steps on the bus. People behind me help sometimes, but otherwise they are mean and impatient to just barge inside the bus," she said.

The first two seats of an MTC bus are reserved for the disabled and old passengers.

But more than often it is occupied by others. The seats reserved have little leg space. The aisle is only around three feet. Clearly these spaces are insufficient even for a person without any disability.

Kanthamma (72), a flower vendor in Purasawalkam takes the 7H bus from Central Station to Purasawalkam. The buses are usually crowded in the morning.

"I took the new red colour bus today, only because it is not crowded. But the ticket cost in these [new red] buses is very high. Rs.11 for just 2 or 3 stops is not right, not at least for me," she said.

However, an MTC official said that the differently abled people were given free passes for travelling to and fro their respective destinations, and the buses halted even in between stops for them to

get down wherever necessary.

However Mary said, "The passes are valid only until their school, office or medical centres. If they need to travel beyond that destination, they are charged. Their parents or escorts are not given any concession."

The newly launched buses have grab bars and better aisle spaces. They have a stop button near the seats for the elderly and differently abled people to indicate to the driver where they need to get down. But since these buses are not very frequent and the fares are high, people do not prefer them.

Kavitha (42), an MTC bus conductor for 11 years, said, "I do try my best to make sure the mentally and physically disabled are properly accommodated. Some passengers understand but there are a few who create problems intentionally. Public awareness regarding this issue is very less."

Shameena finds it increasingly difficult by the day as Usma is getting older, and cannot be carried around easily. "I do not know how I can manage in the coming years if this situation persists. Her education is at stake," she said with a sigh.

Safety concerns in MTC buses

ASHMITA MUKHERJEE

Only 56 of the 3,716 Metropolitan Transport Corporation (MTC) buses have a panic button that commuters can use in times of emergency.

Highlighting the need for such a button, women passengers at T. Nagar Bus Terminus and Thiruvanniyur Bus Terminal expressed concern over the frequent occurrences of pick pocketing and harassment in buses.

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami flagged off 555 new buses from the Secretariat this month, of which 56 belong to MTC. All the buses have been built as per the AIS 052 code, created by the Automotive Research Association of India (ARAI). These buses have been

equipped with amplifiers with panic buttons.

However K. Ravichandran, Superintendent of Industrial Relations' division of MTC, Chennai said, "To my knowledge no funds have been given to the state government for the installation of panic buttons in buses. Moreover, employees of MTC have no relation with the facilities a bus comes with."

Stella Mary, a frequent commuter at T. Nagar Bus Terminus said, "I have been a victim of sexual harassment in the terminus. It was early evening, I was sitting inside the bus when I saw a man standing near the terminal's office building and exposing his genitals to me. I did not raise any alarm as I was in a state of shock. Lack of safety during transit is the reason why I

never opt for evening shifts at work."

Parul Vipul Shah, another commuter at the Thiruvanniyur Bus Terminal said, "I had just boarded one of the buses leaving the T. Nagar bus terminus when someone behind me stole from my bag. I thought the movement was that of my child in my arms. I did not realize I was pick-pocketed until much later."

Karthikeyan, Sub-Inspector at the Kotturpuram Police Station said that he was aware of the launch of the new buses and the emergency buttons.

"There have been no cases reported at our station regarding crimes committed in buses. We have not heard of complaints from women about any lack of safety in buses," he said.



Shelters are unable to cater to the ever-increasing homeless population. | THE HINDU

Homeless lack shelter

BHARAT SHARMA

As many as 49 people were picked up from Marina Beach on January 30 night as part of the drive conducted by the Greater Chennai Corporation every two weeks to rehabilitate homeless people.

Muthu Kumaran (54) has been living on the pavements opposite Madras University ever since his wife died five years ago. He said that the government did help people like him but it did not have any long term effects.

"They took me once too... They just want to dump you on any living family members, and since I have none, I was sent to a night shelter where I spent a night before they told me that they were short on space," he said.

There are currently 46 government shelters for the homeless in Chennai out of which 10 are "special centres" situated in hospitals for people who require immediate care.

The Corporation identified nearly 9,000 homeless people based on a third-party survey last year. Teynampet, Royapuram and Tondiarpet were identified as places with the highest population of homeless people.

As per the National Urban Livelihoods Mission guidelines, there should be one shelter for

every one lakh of urban population. Most shelters are unable to cater to the ever-increasing homeless population in the city.

Britto, who works as a coordinator at Paadhai, a shelter in Valsaravakkam, suggested that women and kids remain a priority for rescue efforts. Owing to this and lack of shelters, many old people, especially men do not receive immediate attention.

"Many of them will stand outside liquor shops and ask others to buy them alcohol... Most of them end up on the streets again less than 24 hours later as we can't stop them if they decide to leave and we have new people coming in every day," he added.

Jaya (22), an orphan, has made the beach his home. Growing up on the streets, he has no faith in government efforts. "What is the point of helping if you [government] give us a mattress and food for only one night. I barely have anything to eat. I would much rather have food than shelter," he said.

As part of the Corporation's plan to construct shelters in Greater Chennai, contractors bid at the cost of Rs. 5.5 crores.

But the bids were never opened amidst corruption allegations regarding stormwater drains and bus routes.

Evicted hawkers return to Mylapore streets

BHARAT SHARMA

Hawkers who were evicted on January 22 from South and North Mada streets in Mylapore have since then slowly reoccupied the spaces on either side of the Kapaleeshwarar Temple tank.

K. Sampath (52), who has been living in North Mada Street for 30 years, has approached the Greater Chennai Corporation office in Mylapore multiple times.

"They [government bodies] respond only during temple related events or when someone important is coming... Even then, it's always temporary. These people [hawkers] eventually come back," he said.

Owing to their proximity to the

Kapaleeshwarar Temple, the Mada streets remain crowded throughout the day, especially during festivals. Many residents believe that if the hawkers were removed permanently, most of their problems will subside. Kajal Gupta (25), who lives in a rented apartment on South Mada Street, said, "Without footpaths, people walk on roads. This creates traffic jams. These jams create noise."

The root cause of all problems in the area for many seemed to be hawkers. Most hawkers sell vegetables, fruits, food, toys, and flowers to be offered at the temple. Jams are aggravated by people with cars who stop to buy street items. In addition, vehicles are indiscriminately parked

leaving only a narrow stretch for traffic and pedestrians. However, the street vendors had different stories about the same situation.

Mohan Shuthan (34), who has been selling flowers in North Mada Street for five years, said that the problem of congestion should be addressed without compromising their livelihoods.

"We get steady if not good income from here... Every time the [traffic] police show up, most of us have to run and hide from them... some of us don't get time to pack our stuff which is then left on the street until the police disappear or they take it with them," he said.

Vinoth Dhanasekar (42), who sells fruits for a living, said, "If

they gave us other places to set up our stalls, maybe we could leave." Most hawkers earn between Rs. 400 and Rs. 1000 every day.

"Sometimes I have had to sleep on an empty stomach because they throw our stuff if we don't move, leaving us cornered," Dhanasekar added. Seetha Achuthan, a regular temple visitor believed that hawkers were only part of a bigger problem.

"Streets are dirty and jammed even where there are no sellers. It's simple mismanagement. If they got rid of the cars, maybe those poor sellers wouldn't need to move," she said.

S Rangathan, an official at the Corporation office, said it was

impossible to provide alternative locations simply because hawkers' occupation of streets was "illegal."

"Even now, they always run away when we come so we barely have a dialogue. They know that they're not supposed to be selling without licences," he said.

The Traffic Police also scare hawkers away for a few hours, but never permanently.

The city has 3,966 registered hawkers but more than 1 lakh operate without licences.

According to the Non-Motorised Transport Policy that was introduced in 2015, spaces were supposed to be allocated for street vendors but nothing has been done, said the vendors.

Fishermen families at Marina caught in a loop

ASHNA BUTANI

Fishermen in Santhome area say that they are being forced to move their shops on the Loop Road because the Greater Chennai Corporation wants to clean up the place and allow free flow of traffic.

Motorists have alleged these roadside fish stalls spill on to the road and impede traffic which gets heavy during peak hours when Santhome High Road is made one-way and vehicles are diverted through the Loop Road.

Last year the Madras High Court pulled up the Corporation for not cleaning up the Marina Beach area including the Loop Road. The court had also directed the Corporation to build a market for the fish vendors on the Loop Road.

The Corporation told the court that a fish market was coming up in Nochikuppam behind the Santhome Church for the 250 vendors who were on the Loop Road. However the fishermen alleged that they were being evicted from the place where they earned their livelihood.

Fishermen from Nochikuppam, Nochi Nagar, Selvarajapuram, Bhavanikuppam and Srinivasapuram set up their stalls on Loop Road.

They said that once they shifted to



File photo of protest on Loop Road. THE COASTAL RESOURCE CENTRE

Santhome, people would complain about the smell and they would be asked to relocate to

yet another place.

The fishermen demanded the setting up of

a new market on the Marina Beach.

Bharathi, President of the South Indian Fishermen Welfare Association, said, "The fishermen are being shifted repeatedly in the name of beautification."

He added that the residents of Nochikuppam who previously sold fish behind the Mahatma Gandhi statue, were shifted in 1968. They are now struggling for more space as they are growing in number.

"Our only problem is the government," said 52-year-old Vijayaraj, a fisherman from nearby Ayyodhyakuppam.

A.R.P.M Kamraj (56) says that the fishermen do not receive subsidies. They require a minimum of 3000 litres of diesel a month, but they get only 300 litres from the government. The subsidy was limited to Rs. 3 for 500 litres per boat.

Also the fishermen and the Corporation have been pointing fingers at each other for the dirt and waste material on Loop Road.

The fishermen alleged that the Corporation was dumping debris from construction sites in an attempt to widen the road.

However another report in The Times of India cited some fishermen as saying the debris was being dumped to level the area along the Loop Road to help the vendors set up their stalls.

Quota jobs in Rly delayed

AISHANI SAHA

Southern Railway has been unable to complete the recruitment process under the sports quota due to the process starting late for three consecutive years from the year 2016 to 2018.

"The entire panel of Southern Railway's sports association was dismissed as they were unable to complete the recruitment process for the past three years," said Suresh Krishnaswami Sadasiva, Chief Ticket Inspector and one of the recruiters for the association. He is also the coach of the ball badminton team of Southern Railway.

"The recruitment process is long, there are over 1000 candidates applying, their

certificates have to be scrutinized and only two or three people will be handpicked after the trials, hence the recruitment process should start at least by June."

According to the Ministry of Railway, there are two groups, Group D consisting of team sports like cricket, volleyball and Group C, consisting of individual events like boxing, chess.

The recruitment under sports quota is done through talent scouting which means anybody who has participated or won in an international championship can apply and through open advertisement, where the recruiters will conduct a trial for the applicants.

Group D has vacancy for 48 candidates and Group C has 25

vacancies out of which five sportsperson will be directly chosen by the Railway Sports Promotion Board.

Suresh said, "This year there is no recruitment of Group D because the previous panel was involved in malpractice and was biased towards few candidates."

Mahendra Prasad, cricket coach at YMCA, said "It has been a long time since anybody from YMCA has been recruited under the quota for cricket. This year they don't have tryouts for cricket probably because they don't require anymore players for their cricket team."

Dr P. Nagarajan, the head coach of Prime Sports Academy which coaches the less privileged men and women in athletics said,

"Southern Railways resuming recruitment under sports quota means a job opportunity for athletes who can focus on their game and not worry about financial support."

"In 2013, two of my students were recruited under sports quota for the women's volleyball team," said Nagarajan.

R Sangeeta, an athlete (high jump) who had represented Indian in the South Asian Games, said "A job would mean financial security; it's good for the athletes. Few years back Southern Railway's athletics team was unbeatable, even now the women's basketball team is the best here." Suresh said that the new panel had given out the dates and recruitment process would start in March for 2019-20.



A park where physical disabilities is no bar | ABHINAYA HARIGOVIND

Park with a difference

ABHINAYA HARIGOVIND

Parents of differently abled children are glad that there finally is a park in the city that caters to their children's special needs.

At the Infinity Park in Santhome, which was opened to the public last month, they no longer need to monitor their children closely as the space is disabled-friendly. From tactile sensors for the visually impaired to swings, sand pits and a merry-go-round that can be accessed by wheelchair-bound children, the park offers facilities for different categories of disability.

"Unlike other public spaces, we do not have to worry about the children here. There are belts on the swings and slides are at a lower height. Even if children fall, there are fibre mats all around so they do not get hurt," said K S Gowri whose seven-year-old son has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and ten-year-old son has Down Syndrome. Both children attend classes at the State Resource Centre for Inclusive Education adjoining the park.

Nithya A, whose daughter has ADHD and speech impairment, feels like she can take a break at the

park herself. "I cannot take my daughter to functions or other places like temples because of her behavioural problems. She needs to be watched all the time. Here she can play freely and I can relax," she said.

The park is filled with sensory experiences. A walking path in the shape of the number eight is paved with materials of different textures – sand, pebbles, grass, fibre. There is a line of wooden sticks that produce sound and stepping blocks of different sizes for children to gauge distance and height.

Jagganathan, Gowri's son, turns wheels of different sizes that are set against a colourful wall. "Since these children cannot do activities like ride a bicycle, the park provides other resources to develop motor skills and hand-eye coordination," said Jawaheera T, a teacher at the Resource Centre.

"Sensory impairments are very common among children with ADHD, autism and mental retardation. It is not just about visual and hearing issues, but also problems of touch, balance and movement. They need to understand the difference between soft and hard surfaces," said

Kavitha Krishnamoorthy, founder of Kilikili, a non-governmental organization.

Kilikili helped construct the park in collaboration with the Disability Rights Alliance, the Smart Cities Project, Chennai Corporation and Cityworks, an architectural firm.

According to Kavitha, apart from around 70 students at the Resource Centre, children with special needs come to the park from all corners of the city since it is the only such space in Chennai. "The idea was to create an inclusive park – it is also open to children without disabilities," she said.

Sometimes, children without disorders outnumber those with disabilities at the park. "Children with autism and Down Syndrome are scared around large groups of people.

Their movements are slow and they lose balance if the swing or merry-go-round is too fast. Children without disorders find it difficult to cooperate with them," Nithya said.

Kilikili is working to set up different timings for both sets of children to avoid compromising the needs of the disabled.

Fearless, the band rages on

AINDRISHA MITRA

The Casteless Collective, whose show was stopped by the police because of alleged references to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in one of its songs, says it will continue with its "anti-caste" and "equality" campaign.

On January 27, the police intervened midway into the band's performance at a festival in Elliot's Beach as the members sang a song that referred to Modi.

This came at a time when the hashtag "#GoBackModi" trended on Twitter during Modi's visit to Tamil Nadu.

Tenna, the lead singer of the band, said the song was named "Modi Mastan" which actually meant "magician".

It was the eighth song that they were playing when the organisers asked them to stop the song and play others.

"We end up landing in controversies due to the content we produce," said Tenna who claims that his band has a counter-cultural



Living the 'casteless' life | SOURCE: FACEBOOK

approach towards various issues that highlight caste discrimination in the society.

Arivu, another band member, said that people often misconstrue the fact that reserving seats solve all the problems for the backward communities whereas the real struggles are much harder.

"We believe in no sugar coating and aspire to reach out to our audience with a hard-hitting message," says Arivu.

Arivu himself comes from a Dalit background and has composed songs like "Jai-Bhim Anthem" or "The Quota song". Talking about the creative

process, Tenna said musicians like Santosh Narayanan and Yogi B inspired them to channelize their rage into words and tunes.

With their debut album 'Magizhchi' released last month, the band is looking forward to more gigs and concerts in the coming days.

"Our popularity as a band remains untarnished. Hopefully, we'll go international soon," said Tenna who has several projects lined up.

Nityanand Jayaraman, who was one of the organisers of the show, finds the incident to be a part of a larger problem country-wide.

To him, the police clampdown was reflective of the fringe-group mentality that throttled any voice with an opinion.

The band was formed in November 2017 when Tamil film director, Pa Ranjith and his organization, Neelam Cultural Centre, collaborated with independent musician Tenna to lead the 'casteless' movement ahead.



A woman cleaning the dustbins at the station | ANKITA MARWAHA

Egmore railway station gets a "clean" chit

ANKITA MARWAHA

Bright green and blue dustbins for biodegradable and non-biodegradable waste, and Swachh Bharat posters, reminding the passengers to keep the station clean, can be spotted every ten feet on Platform no. 4 of the Chennai Egmore Railway Station.

It took endless hours of mopping and washing, and restless days of supervision for the station to rank fourth in the most improved stations across India by the Swachh Rail, Swachh Bharat, 2018 survey, said Mr. Chandan Kumar, Health Inspector at the station.

Since the past three years, there has been an emphasis on the sanitation of the stations and the third cleanliness assessment across 407 stations, released by the Indian Railways in August, shows this enthusiasm.

The survey was based on direct observation, citizen feedback and station manager interview.

"The assessors had informed us about the survey a week or two in advance and when they arrived, they took pictures of the platforms and the tracks, inquired our Station Manager, and uploaded the information online," said Mr. Kumar.

"The workers earlier used to

mop and wash floors manually. The cleanliness level has increased mostly due to mechanisation of mopping and washing floors. Earlier, these used to be performed manually," said an official at the station.

Elavarasu, who travels to Tuticorin every few months to visit his family, said "Yes, I read about the station's ranking in the newspaper, and was very happy to hear that."

The station, during the survey, had ten cleaning workers, 2 to 3 machines, and a few stainless steel dustbins for 15 platforms under a 5-year contract with Bharat Vikas Group.

Today, under a new 4-year

contract with the Krystal Integrated Services Private Limited since December 2018, "the station has 150 plastic dustbins, 28 machines, six supervisors, and around 16 workers," said Mr. A. Chinna (50), Supervisor, who started working at the station in 2012.

"Since I joined here, I have never seen the workers picking waste manually. They are given rubber gloves, face masks, and uniforms by the company while they are at work," he added.

"However, since the last survey, we have improved a lot, and hope to rank even higher next year."

Egmore station also ranked

second in the cleanest station in Southern Railways, after Ernakulam South in Kerala.

Chinna said "The mindset of people has started changing after the Swachh Bharat campaign and people now look around for dustbins for throwing out the garbage."

The campaign, however, fails to address waste disposal and management.

"Although we have provided separate dustbins for biodegradable and non-biodegradable waste throughout the station for the passengers, all the waste eventually ends up getting mixed and dumped in the same yard," he added.

Gender: An issue in the job market

ASHNA BHUTANI

Transgenders say that they do not get jobs easily because people do not want to employ them.

Maya, a 28-year-old transgender, says "I want to work. But nobody is willing to employ me because of my gender."

Her mother still beats her up with a cane because of her identity. She had changed her name from Arun to Maya. She underwent surgery at the age of 26, "successfully," she says. Her brothers and sisters support her. She helps her mother, Lata with selling fish. "I cannot go fishing because of my body," she says. Every transgender gets a government ID card but that is of no help, they say.

According to The Hindu, the Transgender Welfare Board met last in 2013. The government schemes for transgender persons include self employment grants for small businesses, vocational training, material support and access to employment after registering in the State Employment Exchange. However, none of these schemes are operational today.

Maya is a 12th pass from a corporation school. "I can do any kind of work. I am even okay with cleaning toilets a month, but they do not give me that opportunity," she says. Due to lack of government help



No jobs despite having knowledge and skills | ASHNA B

and security, transgender people create communities and self-help groups in order to aid themselves. Kalki Subramanian, a transgender activist, artist and writer says that the transgender family system in South India unites and binds them all. Pointing to a photo of her transgender family, Maya says "This is my real family." Prithika Yashini, her non-blood sister, was the first transgender sub-inspector in Tamil Nadu.

Grace Banu was the first transgender to take up higher studies in the state. Plagued by social stigma and poverty, Maya says "I wish to be as accomplished as my other family members, but I can only help my mother sell fish."

Madras Art Guild: Connecting Communities

ASHITHA JAYAPRAKASH

While malls and shopping centres in Chennai focus on interior decorations that are avant garde, VR Chennai, a retail shopping centre in Anna Nagar, takes pride in being a promoter of art and culture conducting an interactive art exhibition that opened on January 10 and will be open till February 11.

The Madras Art Guild, an art exhibition that has been doing the rounds in various VR shopping centre locations in India, was envisioned first in 2013 to "connect communities through art", says Siddharth, Events and Promotions manager, VR Chennai.

Connecting communities is their brand slogan and all marketing activities revolve around embracing the communities in which the shopping centre is situated. The idea is to give artists a different platform for their artwork, he adds.

Sonali, the coordinator for the month long event, says "The kind of exposure these artists get is extraordinary, because it's reaching huge masses."

The exhibits are a collection of interactive art installations, sculptures and paintings by students of the Government College of Fine Art in Chennai, Pondicherry and Kumbakonam and professionals from different corners of India. Workshops for children, film screenings and competitions, all takes place inside the shopping centre.

Most of the artwork has been about the intertwining of the ancient and the contemporary, like in the installation of The Dice-Time Machine/ Time Dice by Cathaerin Kuruvilla & group, from the Government College of Fine Arts in Chennai. The artist here has tried to invoke nostalgia by stacking up toys that were once irresistible for people when they were children.



Various art exhibits on show at the Madras Art Guild | ASHITHA J