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Ban on plastic hits small manufacturers

ANAND JC

Poor waste management in the state has led to a ban resulting in job losses, Tamil Nadu Plastic Manufacturers Association President, Virendra Bhayani, said.

The New Indian Express on February 6th had reported that Chennai Corporation proposed fines on users and producers of banned plastic items, ranging between Rs 100 and Rs 3 lakh. They will be fined thrice and on the fourth offence, they will be asked to shut shop.

However, Bhayani feels that the MNCs have gotten a better side of the deal. "The MNCs have agreed that they will reduce plastic usage by 10-20% every year and by 2022 they will completely eradicate plastic packaging. These companies are responsible for more than 90% of the problem causing plastic out there."

"It is the local plastic manufacturers who suffer. One of the TAPMA members took a loan of three crore a year back. Now that the ban is imposed, what will he do? He has to shut shop, sack his 40 employees and hand over the keys to the bank. It has now become an NPA. This will happen to 3,000-4,000 more units," he said.

Bhayani said that banning plastic isn't the only essential step. "We agree that thin gauge plastic must

be banned for the betterment of our future, they are a nuisance to the public but banning all plastic isn't a well-thought out step. Managing the garbage situation is much more important."

Bhayani pointed out the lax on the part of Chennai Corporation which led to the sudden ban on plastics. "Countries like Sri Lanka and Vietnam which are lesser economies have limited plastic problems. It is because their corporations have taken care of the situation well. It's called waste management. The Government of



Recyclable waste should be deposited in green bins and non-recyclable waste in blue bins. This system hasn't been implemented in toto, it is only for namesake. There are only bins but no segregation.

VIRENDRA BHAYANI

India says that with the help of local environmental ministry, corporation and pollution control boards, they will take care of waste management," he said.

"The Supreme Court in 2016-17 said that the State government has

to implement a system where they should have two bins, green and blue. Recyclable waste should be deposited in green bins and non-recyclable waste in blue bins. This system hasn't been implemented in toto, it is only for namesake. There are only bins but no segregation, everything is dumped together," he added.

The State government has not created any alternative employment options for thousands who will be without jobs because of this ban. "The government says that they have a 200-cr fund to rehabilitate the affected, but we don't have any specifications about how that fund will be employed."

When it comes to packing food and drinks, plastic provides hygiene that is best, second to none. He said, "Plastic is a gift from mankind. Even in developed countries, plastic is used to ensure that the food is tamper proof. People nowadays who order food online and prefer takeaways want a hygienic experience which only plastic can provide. The government proposed paper as an alternative but more than seven lakh trees are cut down for a sizeable paper produce. Tell me how that is an environment-friendly option?"

TAPMA lawyers are still in the Madras High Court seeking clarifications on the ban.

Death beckons on the Marina

Frequent drownings have led the police to bank on fishermen

BHARAT SHARMA

Marina Beach records most deaths by drowning in the state, with four college students losing their lives this year.

There is no formal rescue mechanism in place. Policemen patrol the beach area 24 hours, but are totally dependent on the Coastal Guard and local fishermen for rescue operations.

"Fishermen are always the first to spot someone drowning. Most people are saved by them... We don't go into the water. If we spot anything, we tell the Coastal Guard", said N. Raja, a sub-inspector at Marina Police Station.

Most officials asserted the importance of fishermen in rescue and prevention efforts. "They are our eyes and ears", Raja added.

D. Amardhass, a sub-inspector at Anna Square Police Station said that, "The beach is open and free. We can't stop people from using it. Many young people go into the water after dark when waves are strong and then drown... Blocking entry would really help at night". According to him, it is illegal to bathe in beach water which remains unregulated because of overcrowding.

Police officers patrol the beach on foot and horses during dusk and dawn. In case of emergencies, beach buggies are deployed. Temporary wooden watchtowers are erected during summers and festivals. In the absence of



One of many mobile police booths at Marina Beach Promenade

| BHARAT SHARMA

permanent watchtowers, there is no way for policemen to keep an eye on the shore.

Janet Shanmugam, who visits the beach every evening with her sons, believes that tourists need to be more careful. "Young boys drown all the time, even the best swimmers... Tourists who bathe too deep in the sea don't understand how dangerous the current can be... maybe if we had lifeguards it would be safer to swim".

The beach, which stretches for

13 km with a 6 km long promenade gets 30,000-40,000 visitors every day. Besides two police stations, eight mobile police booths have been set up to facilitate a quicker response.

K. Ranjith, a constable at one of these booths, believes the key to effective policing is public awareness and following rules. "If people actually understand the danger of going too deep into the water, they would think twice... There are 3-4 vehicles on the beach at all times... and 19 warning

boards just in a kilometre... but they never listen to our advice", he said.

Most deaths by drowning occur during night time. An ambulance is stationed at the Marina police station in case of emergencies. However, no first aid services are available on the beach.

The coastal security helpline (1093) was recently established to report someone in danger. According to N. Raja, more than 200 people were rescued owing to this helpline in 2018.

Violation of traffic rules makes Chennai roads unsafe

ANKITA MARWAHA

The number of road accidents in Tamil Nadu has come down by only 3 per cent since 2018 as opposed to 26% reduction in 2017. The ongoing Road Safety Week seeks to further reduce this number.

With the 30th Road Safety Week, which started on February 4, 2019, daily commuters in Chennai have reported a number of problems that they face every day on the road.

Raajwin, who drives a two-wheeler, said "There is still a lack of awareness regarding wearing helmets. A friend of mine met with an accident a few days ago and he wasn't wearing a helmet. He is in a coma right now."

In August 2018, the Tamil Nadu government made it mandatory for both bikers and pillion riders to wear helmets. However, the police don't implement the rule for the



People embark on a walk to promote road safety | ANKITA M.

pillion riders, according to Raajwin.

With its motto as "Road Safety-Life Safety", the Road Safety Week programme has organized various awareness programmes about the need for wearing helmets and seat belts, and the availability of free emergency medical facilities.

Over 8,500 driving licences were suspended and 1,000 were

cancelled in 2017, the highest ever recorded in the city.

Siva Prakash M (48) said "Bikes and scooters take to the footpaths as the roads have heavy traffic, and create problems for us pedestrians. This happens particularly near the Kotturpuram bridge junction and at the Shollinganallur signal, and there is no policeman to monitor them."

Raghu Ram, a member of Thozhan, an organization that works for traffic rules awareness,



Safety drives ensure speed limits are followed | ANKITA M.

Kirubakaran, who drives a two-wheeler, said "Pedestrians stand at the edge of the road where we can't see them, and suddenly dart across the road, increasing the chances of accident. They often have their earphones plugged in and don't hear the horn."

Raghu Ram, a member of Thozhan, an organization that works for traffic rules awareness,

has been on the road for half a day every day during the Road Safety Week. He wears a placard and a 'Stop' sign, and instructs pedestrians at junctions not to hinder the traffic movement while crossing roads.

The traffic police say they are short of staff.

"Our thana earlier used to have around 70 traffic policemen to

control the traffic. Now, there are only 35," said Mr. Singh, one of the seven policemen at the Tidel Park junction, which comes under J13 Taramani police station.

Some commuters blame hidden signals and increasing number of vehicles on the road.

"A lot of signals, including the Adyar signal, are hidden behind the branches of the trees at the divider. People don't follow the traffic light there because of this," said Vignesh, a cab driver.

Siva Prakash said "The size of the roads has remained the same, while the number of vehicles has been increasing. This makes it difficult for the government to manage increasing volume of traffic."

Chennai remains under pressure as more than 28 lakh new vehicles have been registered in the city since 2008, according to a State Transport Authority report.

Summer will peak in May, June

ASHITHA JAYAPRAKASH

To everybody's relief this year, the Chennai heat will not be hitting us till May. Even the average peak temperature is expected to be around 38 degrees Celsius in the last two weeks of May and the first two weeks of June, according to Weather Underground website.

It will be a smooth sail with mostly clear skies and bright sunny days for the next three months. But cover yourselves up and slap on a lot of sunscreen because there is a high risk of harm from unprotected exposure to the sun as UV index is expected to be at a high 11 for most of this month.

According to Weather Underground, the average day



temperature in Chennai will be a warm 31 degrees, with humidity ranging from 60 -75 per cent in February with the hottest day on February 18 at 33 degree Celsius.

The last week of February will enjoy the coldest nights at 22 degree Celsius; enjoy it while it lasts as Chennai will not be seeing such cool temperatures for another eight months.

The hottest days of the year will be in May and June at sultry 38 degree Celsius, although it is an improvement from preceding years, 2018 and 2017, when temperatures rose up as high as 40 and 43 degree Celsius respectively.

Weather Underground website is linked to the Personal Weather Station (by RainWise) installed at the Asian College of Journalism, Chennai. The Weather Company, the business wing of IBM, set up the station in collaboration with ACJ. The station generates real time data which is updated regularly.

Budget disappoints

AKSHARA SHRIVASTAVA

The Union Budget proposals have been received with disappointment. Critics are sceptical of potential reforms the budget's timing in purview of the coming elections.

On Friday, February 2, 2019, Finance minister Piyush Goyal, presented the interim budget for 2019-2020, proposing a series of measures seen as sops ahead of the General Elections in April-May.

The budget offered a tax cut to people earning up to Rs. 5 lakh per annum. Farmers owning less than 2 hectares were offered Rs. 6000 a year each, in way of direct transfers to their accounts. Funding under the National Health Mission (NHM) scheme was also increased.

Several people in Chennai were sceptical about implementation. "This has been done just before elections, and was not implemented earlier even though it was in talks... the timing isn't right, and the government...is not offering any real relief to tax-payers," said Keshav Agarwal, an IT professional.

"The disparity between rich and the poor has been increasing since the government launched the 7th Pay Commission. For 1 crore government employees, the government has allocated Rs. 1 lakh crore, but for 12 crore farmers it has allocated only Rs. 75,000 crores. The promised Rs 6000 per annum won't help the farmers pay loans", said Vijay Jawandiya, a farmer leader.

"The minimum wage is not proportionate, and the question of inclusive growth has not been addressed", he added.

The NHM saw an increase in allocation from Rs. 30,683 crore in 2018-19 to Rs. 31,745 crore, reported The Wire.

A senior official in NHM, Rajasthan on the condition of anonymity said, "They are diverting funds to the Ayushman Bharat scheme...increase this year has been miniscule."

However, a senior official in NHM Tamil Nadu said, "We have received a 20 per cent increase in our funding, because we absorb the funds well. The increase has been satisfactory for us".

Shortage of teachers in schools persists

ABHINAYA HARIGOVIND

Shortage of teachers and poor infrastructure in schools run by the Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare (ADTW) Department have been keeping students away from them.

According to a notification issued by the ADTW Department in December 2018, there are 475 vacancies for teachers in their schools across Tamil Nadu and these are likely to be filled on a temporary basis.

The primary section of the department's school in Virugambakkam has only two teachers - the headmistress and an assistant headmistress. Gomathi S, the headmistress, said, "We had 89 students last year. This year we have only 57. Though we used to have over a 100 students a few years ago, in the last three or four years, the numbers have been falling."

She attributes the fall in admissions to shortage of teachers. "If a parent sees the same teacher running from one classroom to another to teach different classes at

the same time, they would prefer to get their children admitted in a private school. We often don't complete the syllabus because it is difficult for the same teacher to teach from three different text books at once," Gomathi said.

Three years ago, the school had two more teachers who were promoted to another high school. "I have written multiple letters to the department to fill the vacancies, but they have not made any recruitment



Lack of amenities force students to sit on the floor of class rooms | ABHINAYA H.

According to the ADTW website, the last time they released a schedule to appoint teachers was in July 2015.

To add to their woes, the primary section has only two classrooms without benches and no playground.

The secondary section of the same school does not have a separate English teacher for 90 students. The social science teacher also teaches English.

According to a list provided by the Tamil Nadu Adi Dravidar Housing and Development Corporation, there are nine ADTW schools in Chennai.

At the ADTW Secondary School in Valasaravakkam, there are two poorly lit classrooms and two teachers for classes six to ten. Though there are benches, students sit on the floor close to the open door for light. A teacher who refused to reveal her name, said that there is no headmistress. The 'in-charge' appointed by the department is not a teacher.

The ADTW residential elementary school in Nandanam

can accommodate 50 students but has only 24, according to their only teacher, Saral. They have a single classroom and a headmistress who was not present at the school that day.

V Tamilselvi, Deputy Director (Education), ADTW Department, said that she did not know how many schools or teachers function under the department in Chennai and refused further comment.

The Right to Education Act prescribes a teacher-student ratio of 1:30 and one classroom for every teacher. According to Christy Raj, member of Samakalvi Iyakkam, an NGO working on child rights, "The teacher-student ratio and number of classrooms in these schools complies with these regulations. But, what will be the quality of education if the 30 children taught by one teacher are actually in five different classes?"

"There is no shortages thousands of candidates have passed the Teacher Eligibility Test. They choose private schools because the government delays appointments," he said.

George Town in disrepair

Rundown government buildings with piles of garbage on site

ASHMITA MUKHERJEE

Several buildings, some owned by the Government, in George Town are in a dilapidated condition.

The office of the Sub-Registrar on Davidson Street is housed in a

rundown building with broken tiles on the roof, chipped walls, rusted metal structures and creepers climbing all over the place. The police quarters in the same compound is abandoned. There is a vast garbage dumping area filled

with heaps of discarded items.

Most of the buildings on Davidson Street, Anderson Street, Broadway Road, Stringer Street, Muthunaicken Street and Chinna Thambi Street are in a bad condition.

The residents said that the buildings pose danger of collapsing especially during rain and storm. The owners of these buildings could not be contacted, they said.

An employee at the Sub-Registrar's office said, "Renovations are being carried out. It was earlier decided that the building will be demolished and rebuilt. So far there has been no development on this plan."

Sanjay, an employee in charge of a packaging company's warehouse, said "I have been working here for the past one and a half years. The residents complain about the garbage pile repeatedly but no serious action has been taken. There is an illegal slum right outside the government premises and they store their belongings in the dumping ground."

A woman who has been living in the area for 40 years said "The

Corporation cleans the dump once in a while but that too not the entire area. The grounds are a breeding place for mosquitoes."

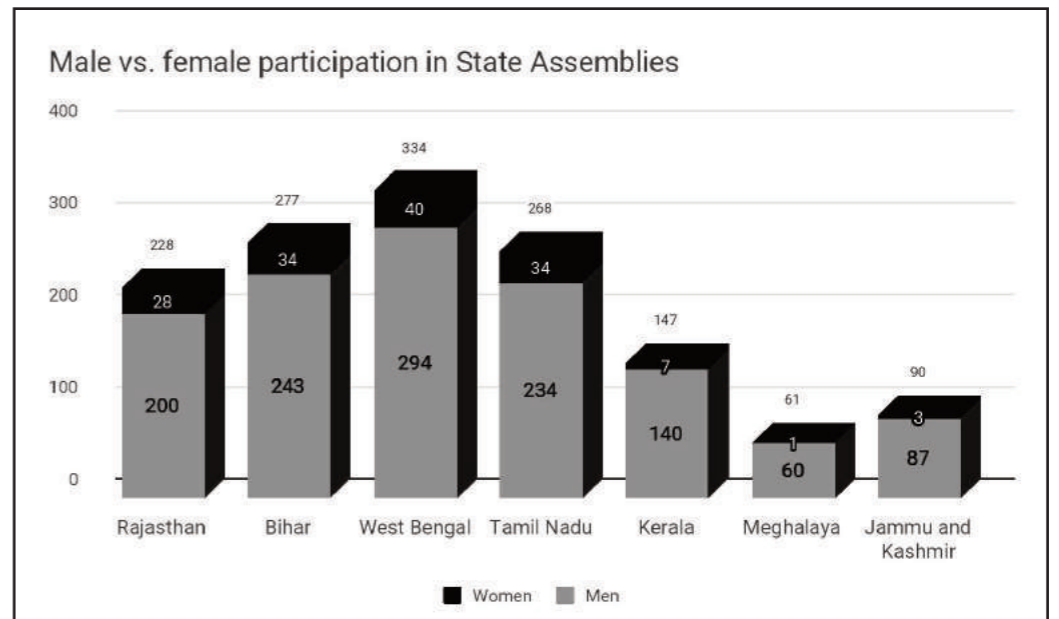
"I do not let my children out after evening. The authorities have not paid attention to our complaints of the dilapidated boundary walls of the government buildings and the continuous accumulation of garbage."

Selvi, 48, a woman living in an illegal slum right outside the government premises said, "The Corporation has been trying to remove our slum for the past couple of years. Every 10 days Corporation employees arrive at 10 am and dismantle the houses. We get word of their arrival at around 6 am. So we quickly hide our belongings in the garbage dump beside the (Sub-Registrar's office) building."

The Times of India quoted an employee of the Royapuram Zone of the Greater Chennai Corporation as saying that there were 66 buildings in poor shape but no steps were taking to remedy the situation as the government did not own these properties.



Dilapidated structures on government property on Davidson Street in George Town | ASHMITA MUKHERJEE



Female representation in the government is abysmally low | ASHNA BUTANI

Women want MPs quota

ASHNA BUTANI

Shakti, a political collective, launched the "Call Your MP" campaign urging people to call their members of parliament from 24 political parties and discuss the Women's Reservation Bill. As many as 127 legislators of 373 supported the bill and agreed to discuss it with their respective parties, according to Shakti.

Despite growing support for the Women's Reservation Bill which aims at reserving 33 per cent of the seats for women, the Bill has not been passed.

"The trajectory is not very optimistic, because there is a lack of willingness among politicians to pass it," says Vidya Subramanian, Senior fellow, the Hindu Centre for

Public Policy and member of Shakti. "That is what Shakti is trying to do, force MLAs to take a stand," she adds.

The Bill was introduced in 1996 but was not passed. "The Congress and the BJP governments could have passed it during their tenure since they had a majority in the Lok Sabha but neither of them took any steps," says Subramanian. In the 2014 Lok Sabha elections, only 63 out of 543 legislators were women.

The pressure group believes that people must stop voting for the same bunch of recycled men, and give a chance to women instead.

The political parties do not give the ticket to women, not because they are less competitive, but because of their male counterparts' muscle and buying power. Hence, only women

from traditional families and dynasties tend to get the ticket, rather than upcoming leaders.

Since August 2018, Congress President Rahul Gandhi has been urging Prime Minister Narendra Modi to ensure the passage of the bill. According to LiveMint, Rahul Gandhi announced in an event, that women would be appointed to 50 per cent of the Congress party's posts.

Shakti says many parties commit themselves to the Reservation Bill, but they do not actually do anything. Women's reservation is important but that should not mean that women take up only women's issues, it believes. However, locals think that women's participation in politics is a prerequisite for female empowerment.

Solar energy projects picking up

But implementation comes with its own set of challenges

ANSHITA BHATT

Generation of electricity through solar panels is picking up across the city but there are challenges in using them in a sustained manner.

The Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) has installed solar panels in 62 Corporation buildings as part of Smart City project, and is planning to install them in 662 more.

"As part of implementation strategy, we decided to install panels first in feasible corporation owned buildings," says Arun Moral, Director at Deloitte, which is a consultant for the Smart City project. "With key learnings from the same, subsequent locations may be rolled

out." Solar panels were installed in some Corporation schools. At a middle school in Kondithope near Chennai Beach, solar panels generate electricity from 9 am to 4 pm, according to the school teacher S. Leelavati.

The situation is not same in the Corporation Higher Secondary School, Taramani. "Our solar panel has a capacity of 1 KWp," says head master N. Kalaiselvam. "We can run eight tube lights, eight fans and a few computers of only one computer lab." The school has three floors

and 27 sections including classrooms.

Moral said "If a solar plant cannot fulfil the need of a building, it takes a long time to recover the installation cost. The return of investment comes at a much later stage."

"This is the first constraint. We thus need data on the returns we would get on our investment, which is different for every building."

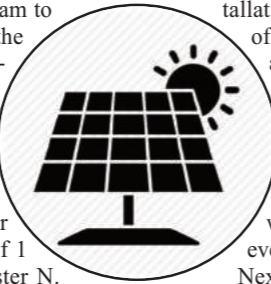
Next is the operational constraint: consumption of produced power, storage and operational losses.




"Storage of electricity through

solar energy is not a problem, but it loses its potency over time. Offices don't work on weekends, but electricity is still generated. How can that electricity be utilised, is a challenge," says Moral. "Hence, we need to identify spaces which can utilise the stored energy."

Vijayalakshmi, Divisional Electrical Engineer at GCC, said "100 per cent of solar energy converted to electricity cannot be utilised. Say for instance, 20 per cent is lost in conversion from direct current to alternating current."

Moral said transmission of electricity to longer distances led to more loss apart from increasing its cost. "Hence, we avoid that option."



WOMEN SPEAK	
 <p>"The bill is necessary because male politicians do not pay heed to issues such as maternal healthcare and safety of IT women, who travel a lot." - VAISHNAVI, A GOOGLE EMPLOYEE IN HYDERABAD</p>	 <p>"Safety is a concern for all and only if there are more female politicians, will these issues be dealt with." - KRITIKA, A PRIVATE COMPANY WORKER</p>
 <p>"Women must be integrated into politics even without a reservation bill." - AISHWARYA, AN ANNA UNIVERSITY STUDENT</p>	



Kalas Mahal built in Indo-Saracenic style | AINDRISHA MITRA

PWD restoring city heritage

AINDRISHA MITRA

The Public Works Department (PWD) is facing challenges recreating the 200-year old architecture while restoring heritage buildings across the city.

The lack of records of Indo-Saracenic architecture techniques and a combination of Mughal and Hindu architecture, used by the British while constructing public and government buildings in colonial India are making it difficult for the engineers, most of whom are trying it out on the construction-site for the first time.

"Different traditional methods are being tried out to see if the paint lasts and the structures remaining firm," said Muthukrishnan, junior architect of Conservation Department who is avoiding the use of cement and other materials which are not durable enough.

One of the main problems of this trial and error method was that it was extremely time-consuming and labour-intensive, since the building

had to be completed within a deadline, added Muthukrishnan.

However, efforts to document the architectural style in form of pictures and videography are ongoing and it will take another two months to publish a manual or a book of guidelines for public interest.

The PWD annexe building situated on Kamarajar Salai in Chepauk is undergoing renovation work. Materials such as wire-cut bricks which is three times stronger than the ordinary ones and natural ingredients such as lime-water and egg white are being used to hold the building together as well as retain the authenticity of the architectural style.

K P Sathyamurthy, Deputy Chief Engineer of PWD (Buildings), said that the government had already restored the Madras High Court, the Presidency College and other heritage buildings which were built in Indo-Saracenic formats

"The instruction for conservation of these public buildings came only

two years ago. Since, then efforts have been ongoing not only to conserve the buildings but also make them disaster-resistant and long-lasting," said Sathyamurthy who is in charge of making detailed notes on the age-old architecture.

Mughal architecture came to South India with Emperor Akbar. In 1758, Chepauk Palace was the first building to be constructed in the Indo-Saracenic style in the country which was also the official residence of the Nawab of Arcot.

Classic Mughal structures like domes, minarets and art-oriented elevations had been paired with Kalas (Pots) and Gopuram (Towers) to form the heritage buildings.

"It is extremely difficult to recreate the nuanced technology of acoustic-proof halls and thermal comfort mechanisms which balance temperature, all of which had been done by the Britishers; but we are trying our best," said N. Jayanthi, Assistant Executive Engineer, PWD (Buildings).

'Marshland will disappear'

ASHNA BUTANI

A research by Dr. A. Ramachandran, Centre for Climate Change and Adaptation Research, Anna University, reveals that Pallikaranai marshland emits much more carbon dioxide and methane than it absorbs every year. "The wetland will disappear if we go on like this."

Pallikaranai marshland used to span over 6000 hectares in the 1900's. Today, residential buildings and IT sector complexes are strewn across the marshland. The area is brimming with garbage. Migratory birds are few even though the region is known for its rich biodiversity. "A hundred birds migrate to Pallikaranai now. But if we maintain it, we will see thousands of birds every year," he says.

His research throws light on the causes for the high levels of methane and carbon dioxide emissions in the Pallikaranai marsh. A major cause for the excess CO2 emissions is the burning of wastes from the Perungudi dump yard and 18.2 gigagram of methane is emitted every year. "As much as 95 per cent of the carbon dioxide and methane is a result of the garbage burning that takes place daily."



Pallikaranai gets more dump, less biodiversity ASHNA B

Ramachandran says that untreated water from neighboring areas and saline water from the sea is a cause for concern. "The issue is not only about Pallikaranai. Water is entering the soil from other areas of the city. This water is toxic and full of methane," he says. "When there is not enough oxygen in the water, natural purifiers like algae and phytoplanktons do not survive," he adds. A ban on dumping garbage, construction of dykes to prevent saline water, and treatment of sewage water are the only ways to save the

marshland. A member of the Pallikaranai Marshland Authority, who wishes to withhold her identity, says that the government is taking several steps to protect the wetlands. "We have taken up eco-restoration of the 695 hectares," she says.

First, the area and its boundary are being consolidated to prevent further encroachments in the marshland. Second, the marshland will be restored by improving quality of the soil. Methods like phytoremediation have been adopted.

Roads or a battlefield?

AADITHYAN J P

The roads at Thirumagal Nagar in Tambaram were re-laid in 2016, after numerous petitions and campaigns. But the roads were then dug up for drainage work, which was completed six months ago. Now the roads are uneven and filled with rubble.

Iruvar, a resident of Thirumagalnagar, said "MTC buses that used to go through here now avoid the route as the roads are rocky and gutted with open drains. Before the school bus used to come to our gate but now my two children have to walk over these broken roads for a kilometer to board the bus."

The residents say the Tambaram Municipality officials deflect their queries by saying that Chennai Metro Water Supply and Sewage Board should shoulder the responsibility.

Eswaran, an ambulance driver, said "When the

roads at Thirumagal were finally fixed after many years, it was a reliable shortcut that I could use in case of heavy traffic. But now because of the drainage works the roads are in bad condition."

The uneven roads pose a serious risk of accidents, so most commuters have to find alternative and longer routes. The ambulances takes ten minutes more and is known for being frequently congested.

"The authorities are not taking responsibility and fixing it up. I cannot risk driving over these roads as it can injure the person even more and have to take a longer route which is also harmful to the patient," he added.

Chinnamma, a local vegetable vendor, said "I used to have good business in this colony, but with these roads it is very difficult for me to set up my cart. The residents prefer to buy their vegetables from other carts on the way back home."

Desilting of reservoir to reduce woes

AADITHYAN J P

The State Government is planning to desilt the Red Hills and the three other reservoirs that supply water to Chennai.

With very little rain in November and December 2018, Chennai's reservoirs are at a low and are drying up. Ground water levels across the city have dipped dangerously low.

The four reservoirs - Red Hills, Poondi, Cholavaram and Chembarambakkam, have a total combined capacity of 11,057 million cubic feet (mcf).

Tenders will be floated to carry

Reservoir desilting will begin in May.
- PWD OFFICIALS

out the desilting process by end of March, 2019.

However, the officials at the Metro Water office at Red Hills were unaware of any such order.

"So far, we have not heard of any such orders. Since it is carried out by the Public Works Department (PWD), we do not concern ourselves with the desilting process. As far as water is concerned, we are still in the process of planning," said Kumaresan, Associate Engineer with Metro Water.

According to PWD officials, parts of the Red Hills lake have started to dry up and therefore, desilting works are expected to begin by April, 2019. Desilting of the reservoir will be done in parts.

The dropping water levels have also affected the local fishing folk. Muthuvel, who hails from Vadagarai, said "When the water levels were higher, we could easily get a catch. But now, we have to work very hard to find any fish".

Parts of the reservoir beds have turned into garbage dumps. The stench has added to their woes, say the residents in the area.

Animal smugglers escape

POOR CONVICTION RATES BECAUSE OF LEGAL LOOPHOLES

ASHITHA JAYAPRAKASH

Wildlife protection officials and enforcement agencies say they do their best to convict individuals who smuggle endangered or exotic species in or out of India, but not many have been sent to jail.

The Wildlife Protection Act 1972 provides for three to seven years imprisonment for any individual indulging in smuggling.

Ms. Shanti Muthuswamy Pillai, Wildlife Inspector, Southern Region of the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau, says, "Our wildlife crime rates have remained high while the conviction rate has remained low. This is because the apprehended is let loose due to loopholes at the time of booking the case." She admits that the forest officials, enforcement agencies and the general public are not aware of the rules and regulations governing wildlife and the forests. Over the recent years, many new initiatives were taken to solve this problem.

"We impart training to forest officials on various sections of the Wildlife Protection Act, and teach in depth about wildlife forensics, crime scene investigation, evidence collection and analyzing circumstances; all of this will lead to the decision of conviction or acquittal."

The outcome of the hard work



A Macaw carried in a basket and brought illegally to India by a group of smugglers | TAMEDPETS.COM

put in by the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau was seen in the recent case of the leopard cub rescued at the Chennai international airport and sent to the Vandalur zoo. Officials of the Customs, Forest department, Vandalur Zoo and the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau joined efforts to take care of the situation.

She says, "If one department had not helped us, the situation would have worsened, for instance, the leopard cub should only be given goat's milk, which the veterinarians from the zoo informed Customs officials."

But there has been no further

success in the case.

Shanti says, "the man we have apprehended is only the carrier. He didn't even have keys to the luggage he was carrying. The only discovery we have, to pursue this case, is the phone number of his agent in Thailand." The officials are set to investigate the case along with the Thailand police and Interpol.

For intelligence collection, there are volunteers and informants around tiger reserves and protected areas in Telengana, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and the three union territories, Lakshwadeep, Pondicherry and Andaman and Nicobar Islands.

Wildlife including star tortoises, black pond turtles, red-eared slider turtles, seahorses and corals are most frequently traded out of Chennai. During customs check at the airport, if they fall under the purview of Convention on International Trade of Endangered Species (CITES) or violate any international trade import policies, they will be booked. CITES was set up here with connection to the customs at the Chennai International Airport.

Shanti adds that trading in exotic species in Chennai is still flourishing. "The domestic trade of exotic species does not come under the purview of the Wildlife Protection Act, therefore our hands are tied."

Tamed Pets, a pet shop in Velachery, has many exotic species like the scarlet macaw, African grey parrot, red-eared slider turtle, ball python, iguana and rose ring parakeet.

Most birds traded here are not native to India. The macaw faced extinction in their native South America. The African grey parrot is endangered and is offered a high degree of protection under CITES.

"We can only nab them if they're found with these species at the airport, as that is illegal and punishable by imprisonment up to seven years," Shanti says.



Family support helps a lot in treating addiction _ LATEET.COM

'Addiction can't be cured'

AISHWARYAA.R

Addiction to alcohol and drugs is like a disease that cannot be completely cured and can be treated and controlled with time and care, say counsellors.

Sheeba Suchitra, a counsellor at the T.T Ranganathan Clinical Research Centre, said "In the lower economic class there is separation, lack of understanding and the concept of addiction is not known. While in a normal middle class family, they are unable to take the fact that a member is going through such an issue."

"The higher class people have issues of super-dependency and a need to be understood basically," she said.

Therapy here is done in two stages - Primary and Extensive Care and Protection (ECP). Each course takes two months. ECP is provided to patients who need more counselling against their addiction. The patients are analysed by the

counsellors and are treated both as out-patients and in house.

Sowmya R, Co-ordinator for Counselling, said "Children below the age of 18 are treated as out-patients since there might be issues of [drug] abuse within the hospital."

Children are forced into alcohol and drug addiction not only due to peer pressure but also genetics.

Sheeba said "Every therapy session tries to find the roots of the cause of addiction, and it is usually when they are influenced by their parents or grandparents who indulge in alcoholism. This affects young minds and is reflected in their adulthood as well. This goes for people of all age groups."

People with addiction need to be motivated to give up their habit. They need to accept the fact that their addiction is a disease.

"People approach for help by themselves sometimes, and other times there is complete denial. They cannot accept the fact that

they are addicted," Sheeba said.

Spirituality is used for motivation, where "God" is addressed as the Almighty and for the non-believers it is the person they are highly indebted to.

"A 25 year old guy, who was well-versed in the Vedas and Mantras had many doubts with his beliefs. He was very closed up at first. It took a while to create a rapport with him. But he respected his mother more than anyone, and it was her encouragement that got him out of his addiction. More than me, it is the family support that helps the patient to recover."

Monica, a counsellor for four years said "Whenever people talk about being influenced by the images of alcohol everywhere, I give them one example."

"A 35 year-old wine shop worker lost all hope when he approached us. But we counselled him and his family and now he is going to get his one-year medal for sobriety this Saturday."

Early detection: key to defeating cancer

AKSHARA SRIVASTAVA

More women in Chennai are diagnosed with cancer every year than men, said Dr. R Swaminathan, Assistant Head, Dept. of Epidemiology at New Cancer Institute, Adyar.

Global cancer data suggests that India sees around 1.1 million new cases of cancer annually, 62,000 of which are from Tamil Nadu. Chennai sees around 1200 women being detected every year, as compared to 1000 men.

The most common cancers in women are breast cancer, mostly in urban areas, and cervix cancer, most cases of which emerge in rural areas.

"This is to do with the difference in reproductive profiles of women from urban and rural sectors. Women in rural areas largely don't use contraception, whereas in urban areas, stress and other factors come into account," said Dr Swaminathan.

In men, the most common cancer is in the lung, stomach and mouth.

"This can be traced to tobacco consumption- both smoking and chewing," he said.

"In urban areas lung cancer is more common as people prefer

smoking tobacco and pollution also plays a huge role. In rural areas, where people generally prefer chewing tobacco, mouth and stomach cancer become more common," he added.

Lifestyle is fast becoming the leading cause of cancer, followed by hereditary reasons.

"The cities are too polluted, and stress often leads people to substance abuse, thus increasing chances of developing oral, and lung cancer," said Dr. Abdullah, a Radiation Oncologist

Data suggests that there are 18.1 million new cases of cancer globally every year. However, even as cases

rise, data shows that seven in ten people consult doctors only after reaching the terminal stage.

"People fear diagnosis of cancer and hence get delayed in testing," said Dr. Swaminathan.

He added, "Early diagnosis is imperative when dealing with cancer and people should get regular scans

after crossing 40."

Cancer institutes across the city have been organising regular screening camps to motivate people to get screened as they remain wary of getting tested. Cancer is no more a death sentence, provided it gets diagnosed early, even as cases continue to rise.

BATTLING IT OUT

Vandana Mulchandani (50) still remembers the date clearly. On the night of January 17, 2015, she felt a lump in her left breast.

"My intuition that night told me that something wasn't right. I went back to bed, but couldn't sleep and got up twice to examine myself. The next morning I and my husband decided to visit our general physician."

Vandana was directed to get a mammography, and a Fine Needle Aspiration Cytology (FNAC) subsequently. "When they asked me to get a second test done, I knew my fears were right. The doctors refrained from saying

anything till it was confirmed, but I knew it in my gut."

Her FNAC was botched by the diagnostic centre and Vandana had to get the test done again. Her results were inconclusive.

They visited the Rajiv Gandhi Cancer Institute in New Delhi on January 29, where she underwent a biopsy. Her fears were confirmed. Malignant lumps had been detected in her breast. "My husband and kids were shaken. For a few minutes, I didn't know what to do, but there were decisions to be made and time was precious."

Vandana was faced with the choice of getting a Lumpectomy or

a Mastectomy. "My extended family told me go with a mastectomy, people think getting rid of the root helps. That was the only time I broke down. It was a big decision and I was confused!"

After much deliberation, her family decided to go on with a lumpectomy.

"The thing that gave me strength was seeing babies in various stages of treatment in the paediatric oncology ward adjacent to mine. I entered my oncologist's room with a resolve to fight the battle head on."

She was operated on, on February 4, World Cancer Day. The

operation was followed by six cycles of chemotherapy and 28 cycles of radiation therapy.

"It is only with the grace of god, and the support of my daughters and family, that I was able to sail through the four years."

Her treatment was completed on August 14, 2015.

"It is the times in your life that bring out your hidden strength," says Vandana passionately.

Vandana is in remission now, and has joined cancer support groups, motivating people to get scans and regular tests for early detection and helping others going through the same ordeal.

Access crippled by stigma

BHARAT SHARMA

Sexual health products like condoms and contraception pills remain hard to find in Adyar. Third Cross Street of Kasturba Nagar houses eight chemist stores. None of these had contraceptive pills while only two kept condoms. Mega chains like Apollo also lack supplies of such products.

According to a report by *Scroll*, the state's drug controller recalled contraceptive pills worth Rs. 50 lakhs after protests from various groups like Responsible Parents Forum who sought a ban on moral grounds.

The Emergency Contraceptive Pill (ECP) was introduced in 2002 by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) and was made an over the counter (OTC) drug in 2005.

According to Siva Kumar, who works at Fathima Medicals, such medicines are "banned" in Tamil Nadu because they are unsafe.

"We earlier also didn't sell them because nobody ever asks us for such things. It is considered shameful and there is no market", he said.

Tuangpui Hmar (24) from Mizoram who works at a hair salon claims that only supermarkets sell condoms. "Sellers make weird faces when we ask for condoms and mostly say no. I have tried to find iPill or Rasinm here many times but never got it. Most of my friends suggested buying them online," she said.

The stigma surrounding these products restricts access, making many susceptible to unwanted pregnancies. A *Times of India* report claims that abortions in Tamil Nadu had spiked owing to unavailability of pills.

Kathiresan Nallasamy, who works at Adyar Pharmacy, said that suppliers no longer deliver such medicines. "When asked, they said that the government has banned them. I think medicine should be treated as medicine. I later found out that there was no ban and they were simply refusing to sell it," he said.

A pill works only if taken within 72 hours of intercourse, to avoid pregnancies. Contrary to popular belief, it is not an "abortion pill". Abortion too, is not arbitrarily illegal in India.

More takers for Chinese-make phones

AISHANI SAHA

Top mobile store chains here keep only a limited number of Indian mobile brands in their stores as the customers prefer Chinese ones.

Mohammed Bilal, manager of Poorvika mobile store in Shastrri Nagar, Adyar, said, "Over 90 per cent of our customers prefer Chinese mobile brands like Oppo, Vivo and Lenovo over Indian brands like Micromax, Lava, and Karbonn because the features are better."

"We just keep two models of two Indian brands Micromax 5 Pro and Lava Z25 as some customers still buy these," he added.

The Chinese phones are also cheaper. Redmi 6A starts from Rs. 6500, whereas the Micromax phone costs Rs 6,999. Lenovo, Vivo and Oppo starts from Rs. 3,699, Rs. 8,989 and Rs. 5,599 respectively.

R. Ramesh (27), who works at an IT company said, "I bought a Redmi Y2 because it is cheap and it has good features." He has never used an Indian brand before and doesn't plan to as he doesn't have much faith in the Indian brands.

Five years back Indian mobile brands like Micromax, and Lava were dominating the market but now the Chinese brands like Xiaomi (Redmi), Oppo and Vivo have taken over, said Mani, the manager



Competition remains tough as Chinese and Indian brands target same customer base | JUSTDIAL.COM

of Sangeetha mobile store in Velachery.

"Micromax and Onida focused on battery backup, but they didn't improve other features like RAM whereas the Chinese brands capitalised on all the features," he added.

Ajit Kumar, manager of Univercell mobile store in Velachery, said, "We just have two models of Micromax, no other Indian brands because people

rarely buy these. Oppo has the most number of sales here."

"Customers now want phones with eight megapixel cameras, 64 gb RAM and good connectivity at a cheap price, and the Chinese brands are providing it."

The Chennai Mobile Store in Phoenix Marketcity mall sells three Indian brands-Micromax, Intex and Lava. The rest are all Chinese brands like Lenovo, Vivo, Oppo and Redmi.

According to the one of the employees of the store S. Sathish, "A few years back people would think twice before buying Chinese products but now they have taken over the Indian market."

The Prime Minister's 2014 Make in India initiative emphasised the importance of making and using Indian products according to the Make in India website.

Sathish pointed out that a few Chinese brands like Oneplus had started manufacturing their products in India itself.

Revati, a third year college student said, "I used to use Micromax until I switched to Gionee because it was cheaper and I heard from my

friends that it had better features."

S Balakrishnan, who came with his wife to Univercell Mobile store said, "I have no preferences for any particular brand, whichever I think is cheaper and easy to use I will buy it." He bought Redmi 6 Pro.

Amit Sharma, an analyst at the Supertron Infotech Private Limited (Kolkata) said, "Indian customers prefer Chinese brands over others is because it has all the features at an affordable price."

NGOs question Corp's drive

ASHMITA MUKHERJEE

The competence of Greater Chennai Corporation in carrying out mass immunisation and sterilisation of stray dogs has been questioned by non-profit organisations.

According to a report published in *The New Indian Express*, the Madras High Court had appointed A. Yogeshwaran, an advocate, to conduct surprise inspections of Animal Birth Control (ABC) centres based on a PIL filed on behalf of the Almighty Animal Care Trust.

The petitioner had alleged that the ABC centres were poorly maintained. For instance, Yogeshwaran found that the Lloyds Colony centre did not have a registry of dog deaths.

Yogeshwaran found that there was no 'pre-surgery' testing done by these centres.

It is customary to assess the fitness of the dogs based on blood tests and physical examination, but the Corporation performs the operation based on a mere 'visual assessment', it was alleged.

Dawn Williams, general manager of Blue Cross of India (BCI), said "A sincere scientific approach has to be taken while conducting the Animal Birth Control-Anti-Rabies (ABC-AR) programme. Veterinarians need to



Out-patient puppy put on an IV saline drip for fever after being immunised at the Blue Cross Society, Chennai | ASHMITA M

be experts and carry out surgeries with care and success without rushing to reach the numbers specified on their employment contract."

Dr. Rajalakshmi working at BCI said, "We can carry out 'n' number of surgeries if there is a time crunch but we always have a successful rate of surgeries as we

give special attention and care to each case."

Williams further said, "Corporation workers lack the expertise and commitment to carry out the programme. This year itself, in each zone of Chennai, four government dog-catchers in one van could capture an average of five dogs. Drivers of these vans, each gets paid Rs.25000 and a dog-catcher gets paid Rs.12000. It is a waste of government resources and time. If this continues, then perhaps the Government should hand over the programme to BCI and other registered non-profit organizations with good records."

The other issue that hinders population control according to Williams is the migration of dogs to cities for better access to food, water and shelter. The three star restaurants discard up to 1700kg of animal waste per day. Push-cart food sellers discard 7kg surplus food as waste. All these refuse get transported to dumping grounds.

Garbage collectors make open cuts in the garbage bags so dogs and other animals can scavenge for food. Having access to such a protein rich diet the population of dogs is increasing.

Williams said, "The corporation should also notify and spread awareness about proper disposal of waste which contains animal matter."

Celebrating 50 yrs of human unity

ANKITA MARWAHA

It's been 50 years since the foundation of India's only experimental universal township, Auroville, based on the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, was laid. To commemorate its anniversary, Dakshinachitra is hosting a month-long festival till February 15, 2019.

The festival includes an exhibition of graphics by a group of Auroville artists, familiarising people with the conception of the town and its current practices.

"Everyone has heard about Auroville and is interested to know more about it," said Sharat Nambiar, Deputy Director of Dakshinachitra. "They are always experimenting and developing new ways of sustenance," he added.

The artworks display the opportunities in Auroville that the people partake in, including dancing, singing, cooking, and exchanging ideas among communities. The town initiates projects to conserve water, landscape, and biodiversity, providing employment to people in the process.

The exhibition also has a section called 'Auroville Timelines,' a video-art instal-

lation project, to pay tribute to the people who laid the foundation and constructed the town.

Auroville was inaugurated on February 28, 1968 by people from 124 different nationalities who brought a sample of soil from their countries and deposited it at the centre of Auroville.

The exhibition was curated by Fredrick Fredrich, who is one of the senior-most Auroville residents.

"The exhibition on Auroville was a magnificent experience for me. I knew about the town but didn't know about so many projects that it leads," said Rachna, a visitor.

"Auroville has always been eager to collaborate with us. We have had architecture, dance movement, and pottery workshops where artists from Auroville were invited to teach," said Sharat.

The 'Journey of Auroville' exhibition is part of a series of national events to celebrate the golden anniversary, that started in Delhi in November 2017 and has travelled to Vadodara (September 2018), Kolkata (January 2019), and is now in Chennai.

No audience for Chennai Open

Poor publicity and odd match timings lead to poor crowd at stadium

ANAND JC

The Chennai Open ATP Challenger tournament at the SDAT Tennis stadium in Nungambakkam saw a poor turnout despite free entry for all the games.

The stadium can seat 5,800 people but the number of spectators barely crossed 100 and most of them were volunteers, family members and coaches of players.

The tournament was earlier classified as an ATP World Tour 250 but was downgraded to an ATP Challenger 80 tournament. The World Tour competition, now known as the Tata Maharashtra Open, was moved to Pune in 2018.

ATP Challenger tours are conducted between 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. as opposed to the earlier tournament which was conducted under the floodlights.

"You can't expect people to skip work and attend matches on weekdays. Earlier, since the matches were in the evenings, the climate was pleasant and it was easier for people to attend matches," said a game official, who refused to be named.

"Players prefer to play at the Bengaluru Open, which is a tournament of similar grade except the prize money is almost ten times higher and the climate is bear-



No more "Quiet please" pleas from the referee. Left: Sumit Nagal in action | ANAND JC & SRIRAJ NAMBOODIRI



able," he further added. The prize money for this tournament is \$54,000 (around Rs 3,84,000) whereas the prize money for the Bengaluru Open 2018 was \$150,000 (Rs 1,06,74,000). K.C. Vijaya Kumar, Sports Editor of *The Hindu* said that the poor turnout was because of poor marketing.

"The event hasn't been marketed properly, so not a lot of people know about the ongoing tournament. Earlier the Chennai Open was advertised on the front pages of newspapers and that doesn't happen now."

The top seeded player in this tournament is Prajesh Gunneswaran ranked at

109, according to the Chennai Open website. "Because of the tiring climate, the quality of participating players has been reduced as well," he added.

"It is 32 degrees out here. The Chennaiites can barely stand it, you can't blame these foreigners," said Kesavan, a tennis enthusiast from Nungambakkam.

Karnatic Katthaikotu: A rare musical mélange

AINDRISHA MITRA

Rural folk theatre artists and Carnatic musicians came together to depict scenes from the *Mahabharata* to a full house at the Kalakshetra Foundation on February 3.

Called "Karnatic Katthaikotu," the performance brought together Carnatic vocalist T.M. Krishna and Kattaikuttu actor, director and playwright Perungattur P. Rajagopal.

Staged for the first time in Chennai in the Rukmini Devi Auditorium, the show was divided into two scenes from the *Mahabharata*. The first one depicted Draupadi's disrobing in Duryodhana's assembly and the second one was The Eighteenth Day of The War, fought between the Kauravas and the Pandavas.

Mostly enacted in the form of a dialogue or a conversation in English, the performance aimed at bringing Carnatic music and



A Kuttu artist performing

Katthaikuttu folk art together.

According to T.M. Krishna, the performance cannot be branded as a fusion piece as both the art forms have their own distinct characteristics.

"The idea was to explore the commonalities as well as the differences between both the performance styles to bring out the best of their aesthetics," said T.M. Krishna, who organised the show first in 2017, in Mumbai.

The show began with a recital of Mallari, usually performed when a temple deity is taken out in procession. It was then followed by the opening act by the Kuttu artists wherein the Kattiyakkaran or the sutradhar introduced Duryodhan's assembly to the audience.

In one of the most striking scenes adapted by Rajagopal, the character of Draupadi asks her eldest husband, Yudhishthira if he put her at stake before or after losing the dice game.

The audience was made to ponder the understated philosophy behind the question. The protagonists used puns and sarcasm deftly to portray the hypocrisy of Duryodhana and Duhsasana.

Vocalists T.M. Krishna and Sangeetha Sivakumar were accompanied by violin, mridangam and ghatam artists.

The 13 Koothu artists from the Kanchipuram-based theatre troupe known as Kattaikuttu Sangam were dressed in vibrant red costumes.

Authentic Chinese cuisine with a 'twist'

AISHANI SAHA

Old Chinese restaurants here say they dish out authentic Chinese food, whereas new outlets mix it with other cuisine to suit the Indian taste.

Cascade, which claims to be one of the oldest Chinese restaurants in Chennai, completed 36 years last week.

Parathe Shradhe, manager of the restaurant who has been working here for the last 10 years said, "The Chinese food that we serve here is the closest one will get to authentic Chinese food in Chennai. Yes, we do add some flavours to the food so that it doesn't taste too plain."

"The Chefs have been trained to cook authentic Chinese but of course they twist it a little," he added.

An authentic Chinese dish is completely different from what people get here. Different flavours are added to Chinese food in India, especially local spices, because Indians are fond of them.

"New Chinese restaurants in town are Indianising Chinese food more and more to suit the taste of



Clockwise: Skewed Beef Sizzler, Chicken Siew Mai, American Chop-suey, Apple Pie Spring Roll | AISHANI SAHA

the customers," said Michael Dunnigan, who has worked at the Cascade for the past 14 years.

Dunnigan said, "Every year during Chinese New Year, we have a new menu for two weeks when we serve authentic Chinese food."

The skewed beef sizzler with spices is one of the most popular dishes there. But this dish is suited for people here because the amount

of spice used is very high.

The outer crust of the chicken Siew Mai dumpling was soft, but the chicken inside had no spices and less salt.

S. Siva who came with his wife and children said, "This is the first time we have come here. The food is decent and the ambience is great."

Shekhar Vij, the chef said, "We try to stick to the roots of Chinese cuisine but we have to make changes because our customers will not like the authentic Chinese dishes."

Sathish, manager of 48 year old Luis Waldorf in Adyar said, "These new Chinese restaurants are trying to make a fusion of Chinese and Indian cuisines and to be honest it is working because they are making good money out of it."

"The owner of the restaurant, Wang Aisling himself is the cook

and is an Indian Chinese," continued Sathish.

"They add colour to food, like chilly chicken isn't supposed to be red in colour but one will find more chillies, onions and capsicum than the chicken itself."

"We don't have new customers every day, it's mainly the old ones who come back," he added.

Thiru, a chef of Rangis, a 31 year old Chinese restaurant in Nungambakkam, said, "These new restaurants makes more profit than us with their new conceptualisation of food, but we try to stick to the authentic Chinese cuisine as much as possible."

The Chinese Chopsuey was extremely sweet, and the noodles dipped in the gravy tasted like sweet noodles.

Shardha who came with her office colleagues said that they came here very often because the food was good and the prices cheap.

S Raman, a teacher, said, "I have been coming to Rangis for the past 12 years. It doesn't matter if the Chinese food here is authentic or not, I like it anyway."

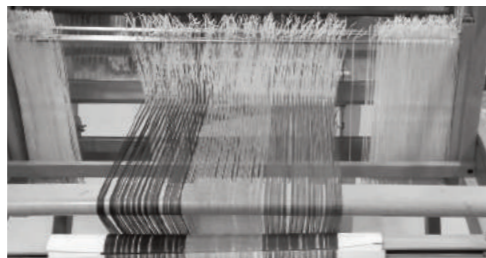
Weaving, now at each one's fingertips

Handloom weaving is not a dying ancient art, but a possible hobby option

ANSHITA BHATT

For six months now, Surekha from Kotturpuram has been weaving stoles without any previous experience in handloom. A Human Resources (HR) professional for 25 years, she has taken up weaving as a hobby. However, it is not as difficult as it sounds. With a simplified, user-friendly handloom machine, anyone from a four to 80 year old can weave their own cloth.

At *Shuttles & Needles* studio in Adyar, the ancient craft of weaving is promoted as a fun activity with regular workshops. "Weaving is a beautiful and meaningful hobby, which has the power to engage and get you to create something," says studio Founder and Managing Director Naresh Ramasubramaniam,



Weaving your own cloth is now easy

who himself started weaving only four years back.

From the simplest looms which can be placed on lap, to complex ones which still don't take more than five minutes to pick up, there are infinite design possibilities.

"From a small loom with four shafts, 42,000 designs with only white can be created," reveals Ra-

masubramaniam. "The loom with eight shafts can generate 2.8 million designs with just one colour." One cannot help but imagine the possibilities with more complex looms and multiple colours.

Technologies are product-oriented, but weaving is process-oriented, he says. He plans to inculcate weaving in schools. "We want to

teach students to integrate what they see in the environment, into weaving. With its limitless possibilities, weaving can bring out the best in children," he says. "The idea is not to learn weaving, but learn through weaving."

In our country, weaving is seen as an activity done only by certain communities, he highlights. "There is no concept of working with our hands. We are used to getting things done. When you start working with your hands, the pressure is immense. That is how crafts become interesting."

The hobby subtly promotes dignity of labour. "Surgeons, scientists, economic professors, industrialists and taxmen come to

weave. When the rich start producing with their hands, value of any craft will go up. The way they look at the fabric changes," he says.

Apart from that, the hobby has therapeutic value. "Time flies when I am weaving," exclaims Surekha. "It de-stresses me to a great extent." Subramaniam claims that when they involve persons with intellectual disability to work on the craft, repeated movements calm them down. He himself weaves for an hour every day, and "it has transformed me," he smiles.

He however, does not like the idea of commercialising the craft. "I want people to enjoy it. The immense pleasure you gain out of creating something with your own hands cannot be compared to monetary gains."

Bookshop today, multipurpose stall tomorrow

ABHINAYA HARIGOVIND

Book stores at the city's railway stations have mixed reactions to the Railway Board's policy to convert them into multi-purpose stalls (MPS). They see their falling profits as the reason for the board's decision.

To decongest railway platforms, the Railway Board had announced in September 2017 that existing book stalls will be converted into multi-purpose stalls that will sell drinking water, biscuits, over the counter medicines, "artefacts of local importance" and books on "Indian culture."

K Jayachandran, who owned a book stall at Park station, conver-

ted it into a multi-purpose stall six months ago on the Railway Board's orders. "Post conversion results have been good. People do not buy books and magazines anymore, but they will at least buy water or biscuits," he said.

Vishwanath Nataraj's stall has been on Platform 4 of the Beach railway station since 1975. "As much as 80 per cent of the business has died in the last seven years and maintaining the store has become difficult after eve-



Books remain unsold as buyers have dipped | ABHINAYA H.

rything became digital," he said.

"People buy only newspapers and maybe a few small Tamil devotional and motivational books that they might not get online. I don't know if selling drinking water

and snacks will help make profits." Slow business has led Nataraj to open his shop at least two hours late in the morning.

At the Moore Market railway station, V Raghuraman has not yet received the order to convert to a multi-purpose stall.

"Since we don't make much profit, the Railway Board wants us to move all the books to one side and sell other things," Raghuraman

said. "Earlier we would sell up to a 1000 copies of *Junior Vikatan* magazine in a month. Now, the only copy of last month's *Femina* magazine in Tamil that we stocked is still on the stand. With mobile phones, nobody reads on trains anymore," he said.

Even at Higginbotham's, at the Central station, only newspapers and magazines sell. "There was a rumour few months ago that we may be asked to shift to make space for a food court that is now coming up next to us," said Saravanan, the manager.

"Fortunately, we have not been asked to move. But sales have fallen drastically in the last few years."

Chennai: K-Popped



BTS - madness, Behind The Screen | ARUNA

AISHWARYA AR

"Kim Namjoon! Kim Seokjin! Min Yoongi! Jung Hoseok! Park Jimin! Kim Taehyung! Jeon Jeonguk! BTS!"

These are the members of a South Korean boy band that has fuelled the K-Pop craze in Chennai. *Love Yourself*, a concert film featuring the band Bangtan Sonyeondan or BTS, also known as Bulletproof Boy Scouts, was screened at the VR Mall in Anna Nagar on Saturday.

Aruna (26) films the flash mob for her Instagram and Twitter page 'tamilnadubtsarmy.' "I used to watch Korean dramas only until 2013. I followed the music in these K-Dramas and got to know BTS through recommendations on YouTube," she said.

"This boy band is unique as it not only focuses on young love but also on other social issues like societal pressures to get higher marks, peer pressure, bullying, and failure to realise your strength. That's what caught everyone's attention," she said.

Earlier a reporter in a leading TV channel, Aruna quit her job and joined an IT firm in order to make time for her page, even during her office hours.

Rhea (24) is an MBBS student

and lead dancer in the dance group LCD, which is popular on Youtube.

"There are new Indian K-pop idols like 'Priyanka' and 'Sid' in the upcoming Idol group called 'Z-girls' and 'Z-boys'. She won the first place for vocal category in K-pop World finals 2016. This is a major sign of hope for K-pop aspirants in India, especially Chennai, since many trainees even below eight years are sent to make it big in the industry," she said.

LCD was a part of the flash mob at the V.R Mall.

Sanjay Ramji, a Korean interpreter and veteran K-pop fan, started a club K-Wave, previously known as The Dorama Club.

He said, "When we started in 2009, there were only about 250 members all over the state, predominantly in the cities. In 2012, there was a mega boost and the number rose to 1500."

Korean Government had fully understood the potential of the industry and promoted it much better than other nations, he pointed.

"It is up to the State to take cultural and entertainment aspects as serious contributors to economic development," he said.

The Inko Centre in Adyar Gate, Raja Annamalai Puram, offers K-pop dance lessons.