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Modi flags off poll campaign

SIDDHARTH SHARMA

Chennai: Prime Minister Narendra Modi kick started the BJP-AIADMK alliance's election campaign in Tamil Nadu on Wednesday, announcing at a rally here in Vandalur the renaming of Chennai Central Station after the late AIADMK founder M G Ramachandran.

Modi shared the stage with Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami, his Deputy O. Panneerselvam, and S. Ramadoss, the leader of Pattali Makkal Katchi.

The Prime Minister started his 35 minute speech by praising the land of Tamil Nadu.

"I am the MP from Kashi, and I stand before you in the land of Kanchi. I salute this land and its people," he said, referring to Tamil Nadu as the land of Kanchipuram.

Modi praised MGR for the work he had done for the people of Tamil Nadu.

"I was fortunate enough to inaugurate a statue of Dr. MGR earlier today. A leader of his stature deserves more respect," he said.

The Prime Minister said that he had asked his Railway Minister Piyush Goyal, who was also present at the stage, to make sure that



Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Chennai rally. The BJP, AIADMK and PMK have allied for the coming elections. | BJP TWITTER ACCOUNT

the Central Station was renamed after MGR.

Modi, who spoke in English, pleased the crowd by praising MGR and former Chief Minister Jayalalitha which seemed to work

with the audience responding loudly each time the names of the AIADMK leaders were mentioned.

The audience applauded Modi when he said that every drop of his blood and every last breath of his

vernment, foreign tourist arrival has increased by 42 per cent in Tamil Nadu.

Hitting back at the opposition, the Prime Minister said that people were in a competition to insult Modi.

"They insult my poverty, my lower caste background. Hating Modi is the trend."

Attacking the Congress, Modi said that decisions in his party were not taken by the high command in Delhi.

If the Congress came to power the decisions would be taken in Delhi and not in the villages of Tamil Nadu.

On the grand opposition alliance, he said that the only purpose of the alliance was to stop Modi.

Modi ended his speech with an MGR song Nalai Namathe (The future is ours) and the slogan Bharat mata ki jai.

Earlier, Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Palaniswami said that Modi was the only reason the people were living in peace. He also praised Modi for retaliating against the neighboring country.

"People were deeply saddened by the Pulwama attacks but Modi reacted immediately", said Palaniswami.

He also said that under his go-



BJP supporters with flags at VGP ground to take part in PM Modi's rally. | SIDDHARTH SHARMA

People still swear by Jayalalithaa

SIDDHARTH SHARMA

Chennai: The crowd was sparse at the rally addressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi here on March 6 with the hashtag #Go-BackSadistModi trending that day on Twitter.

The VGP Ground next to the Arignar Anna Zoo in Vandalur was surrounded by huge cutouts of leaders from the AIADMK, the BJP and the PMK. The three parties are partners in the alliance for the coming Lok Sabha elections.

The 88 acre ground barely had any tree or shade for the people to sit under. Yet scores of people were seen trying to get into the empty seating area near the stage.

The rest stood behind the checkpoint even though there were many chairs left.

The rally was scheduled to start at 3:15 pm, but started only by 4:45 when the Prime Minister arrived in an Air Force helicopter along with Chief Minister E Palaniswami and Deputy Chief Minister O Panneerselvam.

Muniyamma, a water packet seller at the rally was excited to see the helicopters and wanted to see them from a close distance.

"I came here because I believed in Amma. Amma was our only hope and I still support her party. I can also sell these water packets and make money at a rally like

this", said Muniyamma.

People flocked to the helipad and gradually filled the empty seats up ahead near the stage.

The rally started with PMK chief S Ramadoss talking, followed by Panneerselvam.

The Prime Minister was greeted with "namaste ji" and "Modi Bhai" by the Tamil speaking audience. Modi's speech in English was translated into Tamil by H Raja, a BJP leader from Tamil Nadu.

The beginning of Modi's speech saw people waving the BJP flag and blowing conch shell, but by the time the Prime Minister finished his speech, almost half the crowd had left the ground.

The relevance of Amma in this election was evident from the fact that whenever the Prime Minister mentioned her name, the crowd responded with applause and cheers.

Sundaralingam, a resident of Triplicane who had travelled all the way to the rally ground in a chartered MTC bus said that he was there to support Amma's party.

He said that Modi had done some good work in past and so he was happy that the AIADMK had allied with the BJP.

N. Chandran, a resident of Tambaram and a BJP supporter, said that bringing Wing Commander Abhinandan back from Pakistan was a feat that only Modi could have achieved.

Delayed civic elections hits people hard

SAURABH SAGAR

Chennai: The Chennai city has been waiting for an elected Municipal Corporation for the last two years and people have been complaining that their problems have remained unsolved.

In the absence of an elected Municipal Corporation, civic body passed its annual budget on March 4 in "secrecy".

K. P. Shankar, a councillor in the previous elected Corporation, said, "This year's budget of Chennai Municipal Corporation was passed in closed rooms. However, after seeing our protest they have said that they will upload the entire budget on the Corporation website."

Municipal Corporation last saw elections in 2011. After its term ended in 2016, the court stayed the elections citing irregularities in notifying election. However, since then the Government has been delaying elections citing pre poll work including formation of wards

my house. I complained to Municipal Corporation but no action has been taken. Earlier for problems like these, local Councillors always helped."

S. Saravanan, a waiter in Thirumanivur restaurant and a resident of Thattankulam, said, "A few months back public toilets in our slum were mowed down by corporation bulldozers. Now we are forced to relieve ourselves in the open. I have been running to the corporation office asking for toilets but there is no one to listen. I think if we had councillors to intervene, the matter would have been completely different."

However, many people feel that the city is not missing its councillors.

G. Sampath (31), a resident of T. Nagar said, "Without councillors, I feel we are doing well. I think at this moment we are more concerned about the stability of the State Government. Corporation officials are not doing a bad job either. In the

People have been facing civic problems for years.

last two years it never felt as if corporation work has been stalled." However, V. Shri Ram, a blogger said, "Many go around claiming that they would rather have a bureaucrat in charge of the city than a bunch of corrupt councillors. Sadly, not many know that the release of funds from the Finance Commission for various civic projects is dependent on their being an elected body in place. The laws forbid the Finance Commission from funding States where laws for electing local bodies are not in place."

T.K.S Elangovan, a DMK Rajya Sabha MP, said, "The AIADMK Government is afraid of local elections. They know that their fractured party would lose every upcoming election. For the last two years, they have been delaying elections on trivial grounds. We have been demanding Local elections, as the absence of elected representative prevented the use of Central funds for the local bodies development work."

S. Ramesh (31), a IT professional and a resident of Aishwarya Colony, Indira Nagar, said, "The Corporation started laying storm water drains in our locality. In the process they kept two garbage bins right next to my house. The stink of the garbage is there everywhere in

Free 'Amma' meal for construction workers

SHUVABRATA GARAI

Chennai: The Tamil Nadu State government announced another freebies scheme, free food for registered construction workers at Amma Canteens here.

The scheme was inaugurated by Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami on Monday at an Amma Canteen in Santhome. Last year the municipal Corporation wrote to the State Labour department to allow construction workers to eat free meal at Amma Canteens.

Following this, the State government made an announcement in January that very soon they will introduce a scheme that will provide free food for construction workers.

An official at the Tamil Nadu Construction Workers Welfare Board (TNCWWB) said, "Most of the construction workers either belong to Below Poverty Line family or come from the deprived class of the society. They don't have a stable financial condition. So, we had asked the government to introduce a free food scheme for them. Any

construction worker registered here will avail the benefit."

After identifying and necessary verification of the registered workers by the TNCWWB, their details will be sent to the Municipal Corporation.

The scheme is not only limited to the construction workers here only

Workers registered with TNCWWB will get free food. The scheme is also for migrant workers from other states.

but also too migrant workers from other state.

D Karthikeyan, Chennai Corporation Commissioner, said, "Once approved from the TNCWWB, we will send the names of the respective migrant workers with their registered ID to all the Amma Canteens in the city."

'Youth should go out and vote'

SHIVAYAN ROY

Chennai: The youth should be encouraged to vote and engage in conversations relevant to society, said panelists at a discussion here.

The panel discussion on youth empowerment and the role of the youth in shaping the country's future was organized by Twitter India at the M. S. Subbulakshmi Auditorium at the Asian College of Journalism on March 6. The event was a part of Twitter India's initiative '#PowerofDialogues' focusing on first time voters in the country.

The discussion was moderated by Keya Madhvani Singh, Head of Entertainment Partnerships, Twitter India and the panelists were Arun Krishnamurthy, environmentalist and founder of Environmentalist Foundation of India, Sundarshan Ramabadrana a Senior Research Fellow at the India Foundation's Centre for Soft Power Studies and Rachna Dhanrajani, a student of ACJ.

"Empowerment to me stands for freedom; there is no need to change

yourself according to the norms of society," said Dhanrajani.

Ramabadrana emphasized the need for having young leaders at the helm to promote the cause of empowerment among the youth.

"We need youth led empowerment more than just youth empowerment" said Ramabadrana.

The panelists stressed the importance of voting and how every single vote mattered in a democracy and how one must be well informed and aware about not only the political situation of a nation but also know about its natural and holistic history.

"We must be more open to new perspectives, know every side of a story" said Madhvani.

Before the discussion kicked off, Madhvani talked about the importance of taking part in public dialogue and how Twitter was a platform which helped it.

A survey conducted by Twitter among 600 youths of Tamil Nadu saw that 98 per cent of first time voters confirmed that they would be voting in the upcoming elec-

tions.

Madhvani emphasized that this was a step in the right direction as it was projected that by 2020, 34 per cent of India's population would be people under the age of 25.

A short video clip by radio jockey R.J. Balaji was shown where he talked about the importance of each vote.

"Today's youth is empowered, what they need is inspiration. Make every vote count, vote for an independent candidate if you feel the bigger parties are corrupt," said Balaji.

YOUTH SAY NO TO FREEBIES

First time voters in the city want a clean and fair government which does not give away freebies for votes and rather works towards implementing new welfare schemes to empower the people.

Priya Mariyappan, a student of a first-year sociology student of M.O.P. Vaishnav College said she wants people to vote for a govern-

ment that woos voters on the premise of development and not by distributing freebies.

"It's a shame such a culture exists, I feel the whole concept is like bribing voters. People should reject these freebies then and there" said Mariyappan.

"It's okay to accept these freebies I feel, after all the money being spent by them to acquire these gifts are from our money only, so why not accept them," said Prasan Sriya a second year English undergraduate student who shall also be voting for the first time.

"Accept the freebies but vote for the people who you feel will work for your well being" he added.

People seemed unfazed about the alliances the regional parties such as AIADMK and DMK have been forming with central power-houses such as Bharatiya Janta Party and Congress for the upcoming elections and said that it would not affect who they vote.

"My family is indebted to Amma (Jayalalitha) for all that she has done for us, it does not matter who

is aligning with which party now, I shall be voting for who I want to regardless," said Dev Alwar a twenty-year-old part-time electrician.

Meena Raj said while she considers herself to be apolitical she definitely shall be casting her first vote even if it means voting for an independent candidate.

"Every vote counts, I am not going to let mine go to waste" said Meena. She also emphasised for more reservation of economically backward classes in schools, colleges and jobs alike.

"The government must do more for the people in need, distributing freebies won't do them any help in the long run" she said.

According to data presented by the Electoral Commission of India, about 2.6 crore young people in the age bracket of 18 to 20 years have already been registered in the electoral rolls (data as of February 10). This shows just how big a vote bank parties can tap into if they make the right moves before the 2019 general elections.

MDMK joins DMK-Cong fold

Vaiko gets one LS and RS seat a piece; coalition now at 9 parties

SANAL SUDEVAN

CHENNAI: The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) has finalised seat sharing with its alliance partners in Tamil Nadu. The DMK will contest from 20 seats, while the remaining 19 seats in Tamil Nadu and one in Puducherry will be contested by its partners. The Congress received 10 seats, including Puducherry.

The Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK) Founder and General Secretary Vaiko met DMK president Stalin at the DMK office at Teynempet. After the meeting, which lasted for a little over half an hour, Vaiko said, "We have signed an agreement with the DMK where we have agreed to contest the elections together."

The MDMK chief demanded two Lok Sabha seats and one Rajya Sabha seat, but had to settle for one Lok Sabha and one Rajya Sabha seat.

The DMK allotted two seats each to the CPI (M) and the CPI and two seats to the Thol. Thirumavalavan-led Viduthala Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) and one seat each to the Indhiya Jananayaga Katchi (IJK), Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) and the Kongunadu Makkal Desiya Katchi (KMDK).

Vaiko went with the DMK-led alliance Democratic Progressive Alliance, a broad Tamil political front in 2004. However the MDMK was part of the AIADMK alliance but parted ways in 2011 on the



TR Balu, M K Stalin, and Duraimurugan announcing the alliance | SANAL SUDEVAN

issue of seat sharing and boycotted the assembly elections.

Media reports have said that the MDMK will contest the 2019 Lok Sabha election under the DMK's 'rising sun' symbol after 25 years—the last time he contested under the DMK symbol. Vaiko was a senior member of the DMK and was a successor to the late DMK leader M Karunanidhi before he broke away and formed the MDMK in 1994, after being ousted by the DMK workers, who feared that he had gained too much influence, and was a threat to Karunanidhi's son, M K Stalin.

The IJK, KMDK, and the IUML will also be contesting under the DMK symbol.

Manu Sundaram, a spokesperson

of the DMK said "The alliance was formed to defeat the fascist Central government led by Narendra Modi who wants to manipulate and destroy all constitutional institutions."

When asked whether the alliances was an ideological or an opportunistic one, he said that it was a 'working relationship' and that the parties had worked together earlier.

Another alliance partner, the CPI (M) said that the formation of the alliance was to save the 'democratic and federal structure' of India.

Aramuga Nainar, a Member of the TN CPI(M) State Committee said "We are ready to help the Congress in winning the election

wherever we don't have a strong party base. And the Congress will do vice-versa. This is a mutual agreement."

The DMK spokesperson also confirmed that Stalin's sister Kanimozhi would be contesting from Thoothukudi and that the BJP was planning to field its State president Tamilisai Soundararajan against Kanimozhi.

The CPI (M) has submitted a list of five seats that they would want to contest from. The DMK will give two from the five seats—Nagercoil, Coimbatore, North Chennai, Nagapattinam, and Madurai.

The final list of candidates will be fixed in a later meeting, according to the press conference.

DMDK gets four seats in AIADMK-BJP alliance

SHASHWAT MOHANTY

CHENNAI: The Vijaykanth-led Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK) managed to reach an agreement with the AIADMK-BJP alliance on March 10. The party has been allotted four seats. Earlier it was thought that the party might have to fight the upcoming General Elections on its own after failing to form an alliance with either of the Dravidian parties.

After an initial handshake agreement with the AIADMK that allotted the DMDK four seats, Deputy Chief Minister O. Panneerselvam announced on March 6 morning that the alliance had been formed. However, L K Sudhish, DMDK general secretary and Vijaykanth's brother-in-law said that "talks are ongoing."

The other partners in the alliance, the PMK has been given seven seats and the BJP has been given six seats, including Puducherry. Earlier, media reports said that the DMDK wanted to be treated on par with the PMK.

At the Prime Minister's rally later on March 6, Vijaykanth's posters and DMDK's logos were removed reportedly before the commencement of the event.

Finally, on Thursday night, the AIADMK-BJP alliance issued an ultimatum to the DMDK, giving them four seats in a take-it-or-leave-it option. The alliance is said to have been fed up with DMDK's renegotiation tactics. Piyush Goyal



Mediapersons wait for an official announcement outside the DMDK head office on Wednesday | SHASHWAT MOHANTY

held talks with Vijaykanth and other senior DMDK leaders in a hotel on Wednesday before the rally, trying to urge the former Kollywood star to settle on a deal and attend Narendra Modi's rally. However, as talks dragged on, Goyal reportedly left.

The AIADMK-BJP alliance was also upset over reports that the DMDK had approached the DMK-Congress alliance for a deal.

The DMDK was also in talks with the DMK-Congress alliance. However, talks collapsed after the DMK rebuffed the DMDK's demand for seven seats. DMK treasurer Duraimurugan said the DMK-led alliance already had too many people to accommodate DMDK.

"Our party leader isn't in town, and the DMDK isn't important enough to disturb him," he said.

Earlier, State Revenue Minister R. B. Udayakumar ruled out the possibility of the DMK and the

DMDK uniting, saying that the two parties were like "oil and water," and hence would not form any pre or post-poll alliance.

Meanwhile reports said that the DMDK leaders were still in an internal meeting at its head office in Koyambedu. The lack of communication from the party confused its party workers.

Hours before the AIADMK-BJP rally addressed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, a party worker, Gopal Krishna said "I'm not sure what to believe. There has been no official word on any alliance by Captain [Vijaykanth]. We are prepared to go to the rally today in big numbers."

In the previous general election, DMDK aligned with the BJP-led NDA, but lost all of the 14 seats contested to AIADMK. In the state assembly elections in 2016, it again failed to win any seats, and losing by a considerable margin in the areas it had its seats.

Journalist suggests right to recall elected politicians

SANAL SUDEVAN

CHENNAI: A city journalist has suggested that elected representatives face a referendum where his constituents will assess his performance.

D.S. Gopinathan who said he worked with the News18 Tamil channel came up with the idea of having a referendum for an elected representative and investing voters, with the right to recall the politician that they elected.

"There should be a referendum for the elected representative. People shall have the right to assess an elected representative's performance. The elected representative will feel more accountable and responsible towards his/her subject," he said.

"An elected representative's performance should be assessed every 12 months. If he/she does not perform well, he/she should be asked to resign. This is the only way to assure some accountability from our politicians," he said.

Various political parties such as the Arvind Kejriwal-led Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Delhi, Karnataka based Lok Satta Party, and the newly formed Kamal Hassan-led Makkal Neethi Maaim (MNM) and several political activists have been demanding such reforms for years now.

Such a law has found little backing by the bigger and more established parties of the country.

When asked about the feasibility of such a move, Suhrith



D.S. Gopinathan at the press conference at the Chennai Press Club on Tuesday | SANAL SUDEVAN

Parthasarathi, a lawyer who practises at the Madras High Court said, "In the Indian Constitution there is no such provision, but it can be amended by the Parliament if the legislators find it necessary. This would be good step for political reform."

However, there are certain laws under which an elected representative of either houses of the parliament, both state and at the centre, can be disqualified. Under the Representation of the People Act, 1951 and the Article 102 of the Constitution, Article 102 defines the grounds on which a person can be disqualified such as a person being of an unsound mind, or being accused of bribery or corruption and having defected from the party which gave him the ticket for the election.

As per section 8 of

Representation of the People Act, 1951, a person can be disqualified on being convicted for an offence of promoting enmity between different groups on ground of religion and race or offence of bribery or offence of undue influence in an election.

As per Section 8A, the period of disqualification on the grounds of corrupt practices should be six years.

Under Section 9, the period of disqualification for corruption or disloyalty is a maximum of five years, as decided by the court.

Kovai Sathyan, a spokesperson of the AIADMK said, "If the Election Commission feels that such reforms are a must for politics in the country, then it should be suggested by the lawmakers to forward such a proposal to the Central Government."

BPL benefits not distributed equally

SHUVABRATA GARAI

CHENNAI: Special assistance forms meant for the Below Poverty Line (BPL) families were distributed among the privileged class in certain areas of the city.

Last week Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Edappadi K Palaniswami announced that the State Government would provide financial assistance of Rs 2,000 to each family under the BPL category. But it set off protests after it was found that the forms to be filled for getting the cash were being distributed in middle-class and even posh colonies in the city.

A Rayappan, a retired senior journalist, who lives in Thiruvanniyur said, "An official

from the Municipal Corporation came here on Sunday to distribute the special financial assistance forms. Nobody in my locality needs any sort of special assistance. People here own properties of more than a crore, why would they need economic assistance?"

Dr. P Krishnan, ex-editor of Dinamani, said, "There should be certain parameters to trace the BPL people; the government cannot distribute forms randomly to anyone. There could be political motives behind this."

R Krishnaswamy, a retired reporter, said "A man from the Municipal Corporation gave me the form but I objected to it. This is a political gimmick as the elections are nearby." He pointed to the

form, which clearly indicated its use by families that fall under the BPL line.

K. Saravanan, a flower-seller at Odai Kuppam, Besant Nagar said, "The corporation people came in our locality with the forms. We filled it up as we really need the money. But it would be better if the government could increase the amount, Rs 2,000 isn't much to help us get by."

However other families of the same locality said they didn't get any such forms from the corporation.

Guruswamy, a shopkeeper said, "Nobody from the Corporation approached us with the forms. We don't know how only a few people in our locality got the forms. But it

would be really helpful if we get the money."

T.K.S. Elangovan, Rajya Sabha DMK MP, stated, "This is a vote catching move as the Lok Sabha elections are nearby. The state government is giving the benefit only to their party workers and supporters. The common people are not getting any benefit from this."

However C. Ponnaiyan, spokesperson of AIADMK, said, "The news about all the BPL people not getting assistance is false, it is being spread by the opposition party to ruin our purpose."

The Municipal Corporation authorities refused to comment on the matter.

Anna Uni fee hike gets mixed replies

SAMANTHA SHAJI

CHENNAI: Engineering students from Anna University and its affiliated colleges have mixed reactions to the new regulations on clearing their arrears.

The new rules dictate that students who fail to clear their first semester can rewrite their exams two weeks after the results are announced, without waiting for the subject to be offered in the next semester. But they will not be allowed to enter the third year (starting from the fifth semester) of college if they fail to clear the exam in three attempts. Instead, they will have to redo the failed course with the regular students who are their

juniors.

Anirudh Raghav, a fourth year student at SRM Easwari Engineering College, said, "These regulations make passing much easier for those who are studying engineering now. The whole process of clearing our arrears was much more difficult for us who are already in the course."

He adds that such a change is helpful to the students as they now don't have to wait for the chance to their exams. It is an advantage as the students won't lose motivation to re-write their papers, as would happen in cases when they had to wait for entire semesters for their chance at redemption.

However, he also points out that

this wouldn't have any direct impact on the quality of engineers that the university produces. The quality of engineers, Raghav explains, is directly proportional to the curriculum that is prescribed for the students.

Currently, the prescribed syllabus is not challenging enough for the students. The quality of engineers graduating from the university will become better only when the syllabus is made more practical, Raghav says.

However, there are those of the opinion that this new regulation could be detrimental to the overall growth of the individual student, as well.

According to Atul

Venkarasubramani, an ex-student of Dr. MGR Education and Research Institute, the new regulations are almost like policing because the focus is primarily on passing the exam. Though the focus on exams is important, there should be an equal focus on extracurricular activities which help in all-round growth of the individual. These new regulations should not take away from the same.

The new regulations are to be put into practice from the new academic year and hence won't be applicable to already enrolled students of the 2017-2018 and the 2018-2019 batches, according to the statement issued.

Why are IAS success rates dropping in Chennai?

SMRUTI DESHPANDE

CHENNAI: The reason behind last year's dip in the UPSC results was because of change in syllabus and commercialisation of the institutes, said M. Karthikeyan, Additional Government Leader and Honorary Director of Manidha Naeyam, an Indian Administrative Services (IAS) academy, and a charitable institute.

Last year, Tamil Nadu saw a 46 percent dip in the selection of candidates in the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC). Forty-two candidates from the State were selected for the 990 posts across the country for the Administration Services.

"All the institutes are mostly owned by former candidates who went up to interview level and failed. They are patterned to a

different set of syllabus. Also, for the preparation of the Main Examination that includes subjects like Governance, Ethics, Internal Security and Society, we don't have a good set of faculty at present," Karthikeyan said.

He also added that the second paper of General Studies, which included Mathematics, Logical Aptitude, Reasoning and English, used to be a scoring paper, but the UPSC turned it into a qualifying paper.

He said that the institutes here do not adapt to trends. "Post 2000, options like Public Administration, Geography and Sociology were popular. After 2011-12, the trend changed and subjects like Political Science and Anthropology started getting scope. Since, the faculties were all drop out of civil services, there was a dearth of faculty for the

two subjects," he said.

Drawing a comparison between institutes in Delhi and Tamil Nadu he said that in Delhi, as the trends change, institutes offering those subjects will grow. "For instance, if Geography is popular, the geography institute will grow. When Geography comes down, Anthropology institute will grow. But here, just because the faculty knows Geography better, they will keep capitalising on geography. This is one reason why majority of students are pulled towards Geography in Tamil Nadu. The reality is, the subject has lost its term and Political Science has gained importance. But there is no proper coaching for Political Science, here," he said.

In Karthikeyan's opinion, the institutes in the State have become very commercial in nature and tend

to misguide the students through marketing and advertising for their own monetary gain. He said that business ethics in Chennai have fallen hard. "There is a well-known institute in Chennai whom I won't name, but they claimed that they got 39 out of 89 results. All of us know, Tamil Nadu results are coming down, but they did not shy away from claiming that number. The problem is, there is no check on such things, so people can make blatant assumptions without any consequences. Neither the media, nor the government, nor the UPSC cross-checked it. They claim they have produced more than 900 officers so far, which is practically not true," he said.

He said that private institutes attract students by calling influential people like Pranab Mukherjee as guests. "They even

pay retired IAS officers a very handsome amount just to earn their goodwill and that there's nothing that could be done about this situation. It is the students who should do the basic research. The government must interfere into this or else, it's going to be a bigger scam in the long run. It's already a worrying trend among the private coaching classes in Chennai," he said.

According to Karthikeyan, the government should make it mandatory for the institutes to register so that they are certified. "IAS academies claim results but there is no fact check. Ultimately, the losers are the students. The State Government should compete with these people. The whole issue of proliferation of IAS in the State happened because of free coaching that was provided by the

government," he said.

Vivanesh Parthiban, a 25-year-old student, who has taken education for UPSC exams, both in Chennai and in Delhi said, "Cracking the exams is hard. There are somewhere around a thousand posts and there are lakhs of people competing. So the winning rate would be less than two percent. These exams are also very different from the usual school and college exams. They do not have repetition of questions. Therefore why Tamil Nadu rate has gone down is because they do not have a proper awareness of the exam. It is ironical, that Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have a high success rate than southern Indian States, even though the latter have the highest literacy rate."

Since he has previously studied in Delhi, Parthiban has observed

that the students from those states are passionate to get into administration. He says it is because they're practically closer to the Central Government and are influenced more than other students belonging to other States. Parthiban adds, "Delhi being the hub of UPSC, it is easily accessible to them. Also, the system in Delhi is much more qualitative than Tamil Nadu."

"The other reason is that Delhi University (DU) and Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) are factories of UPSC entrance, which make students believe that they have all the potential to crack the examination," he said.

In recent years, places like Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan have taken the pole position amongst the places with the highest success rates for IAS aspirants.

New regulations irk spa owners, customers

SAURABH SAGAR

CHENNAI: The Greater Chennai Municipal Corporation has issued order which mandate trade licences for spas, massage parlours and beauty salons across Chennai before April 1. Apart from mandating trade licences, the civic body has also laid guidelines to regulate them which include installation of CCTV cameras installation at the gates, verification of educational qualification for employees and the working hours. The guidelines strictly warned against any form of sexual activity in any closed rooms.

Earlier, the licence given to hair cutting saloons was given to massage parlours and spas, as there was no separate provision.

An inspector of the Anti-Vice Squad said that the police had been demanding a strict law for controlling spas and their activities. He said that there were around 125 spas in the city but only 25 percent were real spas. The rest were somehow involved in sexual activities.

"This new requirement will help us to save innocent girls who are



Law mandates cameras at entry points in spas |GOOGLE

forced into this sex trade," he added.

Most of the spa owners denied any knowledge of the new requirement. However, some questioned this order.

R. Ravichandran (39), owner of Green Trends unisex hair and style salon, said, "We will comply with all the rules set for trade licence. We do not have any closed rooms

in our spa. We have two rooms one for hair cutting and other for massage. I think installation of camera is linked with the thought that every massage parlour is involved in sexual activity."

A lot of people went to spas and massage parlour to relax them from hectic schedule.

S. Wilson (40), owner of Dreamz Skin and Hair Salon in Adyar said,

"After arrival of software companies and automobile giants like Ford, Hyundai and Mahindra on the outskirts of Chennai, visitors to spas and massage parlours have increased.

Lakhs of IT and management professionals work in city and the high levels of stress in their work have compelled them to visit spas. We are professional and I think most of us do not indulge in unlawful activities."

S. Gautam (36), a IT professional who visits spas regularly said, "CCTV cameras and the fear of police cannot regulate these spas which indulge in sexual activities. Now, if someone knows that he would be recorded every time he visits, why would he go? I myself won't prefer."

The smaller, hair cutting shops have a different problem. One of the owners said that the cost of a CCTV could be an extra burden for him. He said that he recently installed a CCTV camera and air conditioner inside his shop but it seemed that now he needed to install a camera outside, adding to his budget.



No progress has been made in marking hawkers zones in Chennai as of now |GOOGLE

Vendors await progress

SHASHWAT MOHANTY

CHENNAI: With less than a month to go for the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) to demarcate specific vending areas for hawkers, progress has ranged between little to none.

According to a decision taken by the GCC in November last year, only four streets in every ward would be allotted to registered hawkers to sell their goods.

These streets have to be at least 40 feet wide, and would be near bus stops, stations, and temples to ensure that the vendors get adequate customers.

However, most zones have not begun the procedure of identifying streets and making appropriate arrangements.

In areas such as Adyar and Anna Nagar, residents say that they do not want any hawking zones, and

that all the street vendors should be moved to other zones.

"We want our footpaths, plain and simple. Every day, there are a host of hawkers who line up in the evenings. Next morning, they leave a mess behind. It's a nuisance, I hope the corporation fasttracks the entire process," said A. Sanjai, a resident of Adyar.

However, street vendors do not see the deadline as an immediate problem. They say that they are more afraid of the daily harassment by cops and locals than of the lawmakers.

"Compared to what we have to face every day with the police and other society members, this plan can wait," said Dakshina Murthy, who runs a small tea shop in Anna Nagar.

He faces regular extortion by the local policemen, to whom he has to pay anywhere between Rs. 100 and

300 in a week. "And of course, complimentary tea any time any man in a uniform comes," he said.

However, he is not averse to an ID card.

"If I can be registered and I can conduct my business in a legal manner, then I am all for it. However, I don't trust the authorities to take this up any time soon," Murthy added.

Elected in December last year, C. Thiruvettai, president of the Chennai Street Vendors' Association in Koyambedu, said that the first step of issuing biometric ID cards had not been completed.

"Only 19,000 vendors out of 40,000 vendors have biometric cards.

The civic body took photographs of some 27,000 vendors a few months ago, as part of the process to issue the cards," he said.

New tech to fight water scarcity

SHREYA BASAK

CHENNAI: Residential establishments and IT Parks are turning to technology startups to enhance water management and analyse water consumption at micro levels to fight water scarcity this summer.

According to the start-ups, water is not measured like electricity, gas and other resources. Irrespective of the amount individually consumed, the total amount is divided by the total number of users in a unit. Therefore, individuals become careless in consuming water as they do not have to be accountable for the amount consumed.

Selvakumar, Director of WeGot

Utility Solution said, "I can pull out the data for that but on an average, for example, when somebody has kept the tap running for one minute, let's assume one liter water is wasted, which can translate to 60 liters of water in an hour." "So with the help of technology, we will alert you immediately if someone has kept a tap open, or where the leakage has happened. All this info will be available readily, we will be able to remotely shut off the tap and fix leakages also, with the help of a technology called 'solenoid valve'." WeGot is a four-year old utility company that provides conservation techniques to help track water usage and encourage savings.

Therefore, instead of meters, it's feasible to shift towards taps fixed with sensors. There are a couple of other technologies, which will readily give the data on the amount of consumed and wasted water enabling people to become conscious. The process happens through the internet-of-things (IoT) digital platform for water management, called 'VenAqua', according to Selvakumar.

Facilio, is another tech start-up company that analyses water data of large firms such as S P Infocity, RMZ Millenia business park and others. A senior market official at Facilio said that the buyers of Facilio had a dashboard monitoring water supply and its consumption

thus seeing extra capacity that is being run. The model includes energy analytics drawing data from every meter and runs a data search.

According to an official, the company has saved around 30-50 per cent daily water wastage from what it was four years ago in Chennai. He said, "This is a basic psychology, once people have to pay for how much they waste, they will be very conscious. Like electricity, I switch off my fans, lights and AC when going out, therefore why not be more careful about water?" With "machine learning" these tech companies are aiming to create a complex algorithm to measure amount of water consumed.

No action on unlawful parking

SHREYA BASAK

CHENNAI: It's a common sight to watch pedestrians squeezing themselves through two wheelers, four wheelers and auto-rickshaws parked in a haphazard manner along the two sides of Besant Nagar Sixth Avenue.

Pedestrians and shopkeepers say that despite repeated complaints to the Greater Chennai Corporation no action has been taken to remove footpath encroachments and illegal parking along the roadside.

Sonu Yadav (18), a salesman at Stylo, in Besant Nagar, said that the number of vehicles increases after 5 p.m. with people thronging the Besant Nagar beach. The shopkeepers and residents put up 'No Parking' boards, people ignore them.

The boards are often broken and tampered with.

After the last board was taken out, the locals put up another board, but that is now hidden by a huge hoarding. Although the only authorized parking is allowed along the Besant Nagar beach stretch, the entrances of shops and markets along the sixth avenue are blocked

by parked vehicles, making it difficult for customers to make their ways.

Nilgiris, a supermarket at Besant Nagar has its own parking space



Cars haphazardly parked in Besant Nagar |SHREYA BASAK

for customers, yet, outsiders also park their vehicles there for a long time. According to the watchman,

they do not have any person assigned to "specifically look over parking" and that's the problem. The fruit shop adjacent to the market has its entrance blocked by

How does it matter if we park in an empty space where there are no shops and houses? We are not causing any trouble," said RK Iyer, a 42-year old man who had his car parked in front of Nilgiris. Sonu said, "Residents are to be equally blamed. They have their guests' cars parked here and there and if we dare to complain against that, the situation turns violent."

According to locals here, police patrol the area but take no notice of the unauthorised parking. "We levy a fine of 250 rupees and also urge people to call traffic police helpline number 103, more than that it's not possible for us to keep a check all the time. The matter pertaining to this area should be directed to Sastri Nagar Police," said a Sub-Inspector at Adyar Police Station.

A Traffic Investigation Officer at J5 Sastri Nagar Police Station said "Issues pertaining to parking regulations do not come under our purview. The matter should be raised to the Commissioner's office in Egmore." Illegal parking has been a long-unresolved traffic issue here despite GCC's earlier attempts to solve it.

motorcycles. "It's very difficult to get a parking space along the beach; hence we park in this area.

RTO says bike taxis are illegal

RAJAT THAKUR

CHENNAI: Tamil Nadu Transportation Department officials have impounded several illegal Ola bike taxis in the city.

Hundreds of Ola drivers blocked the Ekkatuthangal road on February 26 in protest against Ola's decision to start bike taxi service. The Ola drivers also lodged a complaint with the Regional Transport Office.

"Ola bikes are illegal and are not allowed in our state.

The Transport Department has not given any permission for running the service," said Yograj, Chennai South RTO.

"Using bike for purposes other than private use is violation of the rules and regulations of the state," he added.

App based aggregator Ola is running bike taxi service, which is cheaper and faster.

"So it does not just save your time, it also saves you a dime," says Ola bike advertisement.

K. Balaji, a commuter said "I found it convenient to move around."

A few on other hand termed it unsafe and unreliable.

Kavitha, another commuter said, "I would prefer cab over bikes because they are more safe and reliable. It is also very uncomfortable to sit on a bike, that too with a stranger."

Sathish, who works for an IT company, said, "It can get worse during rains or hot summer



Ola bike taxis |GOOGLE

days."The protesting drivers said that this service was unlicensed as two wheelers did not have the permit to operate as commercial carrier.

One needed to have a licence to run vehicles for commercial purposes.

Riding Ola bike also comes with several risks, the commuters say. Ola bikes are run by bikers with no safety and accountability for the rider.

Commercial vehicles have yellow registration plates whereas all Ola bikes have white registration plates. The cabs are run by the drivers on contract. They are covered by insurance.

"We are going to stop this practice as soon as possible. We will not tolerate such kind of violations," said Yograj.

Ola could not be reached to comment.

However, bike taxi services are operational in a few cities in India, including Agra, Gurgaon and Jaipur.

E-vehicles for greener future

SMRUTI DESHPANDE

CHENNAI: In order to encourage usage of e-vehicles, the Central government plans to build a battery-charging eco-system at public places. It would enable people and automobile companies to switch from fuel driven cars to eco-friendly modes of transportation. In August 2018, a new policy was adopted with the aim of promoting eco-friendly mode of transportation.

By 2030, the government plans on 100 percent electrification of public transport and 40 percent electrification of private transport.

The electricity needed by E-Vehicles (EVs), will be fulfilled by using solar-power, lithium-ion batteries and swappable batteries.

Ashok Jhunjhunwala, Principal Advisor, the Ministry of Power and New and Renewable Energy, Government of India, and a Professor at IIT Madras, wrote in his blog, "On charging of batteries, he said that low-cost AC001 (type of charger) should be installed in all city-parking lots and in office parking. This would enable top-up charging for 2-Wheelers in about 1-2 hours, Economy cars in about 4-5 hours, and premium cars in 6 to 8 hours."

"Audi, the German automobile company has come up with an electric car model which has been released in the United States. It is planning to get the car in India in 3-4 years, but the imported cars will require immense charging ecosystem for which new facilities will be needed," said C. Lakshmi, 33, Sales Manager at an Audi showroom in Saidapet.

Chennai - a hub for Nepali migrant workers

SABITRI DHAKAL

Chennai: Lack of job opportunities, lack of education and skills, poor financial condition and a dream to live a better life have brought many Nepalis to Chennai. Many Nepali men work in restaurants and as security guards while women work in beauty parlours and as housekeepers in the city. Jeevan Bahadur Gharti, aged 28, came here from Baglung three years ago and works as a security guard in Adyar. "I came to know about the job as many people from my village were working here. I came on their advice," he said.

Gharti later brought his wife and mother to the city. Both work as

housekeepers.

Gharti earns Rs 14,000 a month as the security guard and is given a room and food. "As I don't have to pay for food and room there is less expense. I have been saving the money I am earning," Gharti added. Increasing responsibilities and poor income forced Rishi Ale, aged 36 and from Damauli, a district in western Nepal, to migrate five years ago. Earlier he used to work in the fields in Nepal.

"The farming we were doing was subsistence. Whatever we used to grow it was sufficient only to feed the family. As the children are growing I need money to educate them and as I am not much educated I couldn't find a good job

in the village. I couldn't afford to go to Gulf countries where the wages are higher than that in Chennai. So I opted for Chennai," Ale said.

The Nepalis working here want to go back home and do something productive. But to live their dream it needs money.

"I will open a beauty parlour myself in Nepal and will work there. But even to start your own venture one needs money. I will work here, learn the necessary skills and will save money to open a beauty parlour there," said Sapana Thapa, aged 19 from Gulmi, a district in western Nepal.

Prakash Thapa aged 24 of Gulmi migrated to the city three months

ago. "I came here as my uncle was living here since long. I was searching for a job in the village and as I couldn't get any job I came here. I have been working as a cook in a local restaurant here in T Nagar," he said. He earns Rs 18,000 per month and as the restaurant provides a shared room apartment and food he is able to save money.

"I am saving money so that I could open a restaurant in Nepal. Living and working in Chennai is also a learning opportunity. I am learning to prepare varieties of food," he said. However, the Nepalis here say they have been facing problems such as long working hours, disparity in wages,

lack of holidays and harassment time and again. These migrant workers have no one to turn to during the time of troubles; they lack emotional support and are under pressure to earn more. "If you are a Nepali migrant then you are discriminated. Either they pay you low or abuse or harass you. But despite all these there is no way out as you need money for survival," said Prakash.

In the world Bank survey a total of 2.1 million people are working abroad including India. Out of 2.1 million people working abroad 41 per cent workers are in India, 38 per cent are in gulf countries, 12 per cent in Malaysia and 8.7 per cent are in developed countries.



Nokhram Bhandari (46) working as a security |SABITRI

WOMEN'S DAY

'Do more than celebrate'

Women's Day means very little for women in Chennai

SABITRI DHAKAL

CHENNAI: Women in the city don't find it significant to celebrate the International Women's Day on March 8 as such events haven't changed their living conditions.

"There is nothing as security, freedom, equity for women. Women are raped and are harassed. When the society we are living is not safe then what is the use of celebrating the day," said S Amritha, a 17-year-old student from Madurai currently living in Chennai.

Even though it is known as the second best city for women in South India, women in Chennai still seem to be struggling with the same issues like their counter-parts in North India do.

"Instead of celebrating the day a lot more real things such as educating women, construction of toilets in schools, providing security, ending of child marriage should be immediately done," she added.

Some women feel that there is no honour in their life. They feel that the man in their life should play a significant role in guaranteeing their rights.

"If you get a husband who loves you and takes care of you then you



A woman tying flowers together to make garjas before the evening crowd arrives. | SABITRI DHAKAL

are lucky to enjoy all the freedom in life. If you have an abusive husband then there is nothing in life except sadness," said S Karnam, a 55-year-old resident of Taramani.

Many women in the city don't even know that the day is celebrated to honour women and their contribution.

"I don't know that there is such a day," said A. Ponuthayi, 44, a resident of Taramani.

"I will be working on the day like other days. I don't know about women's right but I know that I have to work hard to make my survival as there is no one I can rely on for financial assistance to meet

my ends," she said.

When voices have been raised demanding equal rights and freedom for women, the women are fighting in their domestic spheres for their survival.

"Neither my children listen to me nor can I decide anything in my home. The money I have been earning is even taken by my family. What is the use of celebrating the women's day when we are abused by our own family members in our homes?" questioned 46-year-old K Pushpa.

She also explains how sometimes, her children don't allow her to sleep inside the house during the nighttime and is unsafe.

T Kamala, aged 60, said, "I came to know about women's day only a few years before. There are various television shows about women's day."

Though she doesn't know anything about women's rights she feels that education is necessary to make a change in a woman's life.

She advises women to educate themselves, to be brave and to make their voices heard.

"You don't have to feel weaker or inferior when your family members fight with you. You need to be educated and financially powerful," she said.

Women say yes to "Safe Zones" in city

SAMANTHA SHAJI

CHENNAI: Women in the city are looking forward to the establishment of "safe zones" within Chennai, as envisioned by the Greater Corporation of Chennai.

Earlier in 2018, the Corporation had identified locations around the city that they considered "hotspots" of crimes against women.

The number of incidents of chain snatching, eve teasing and other forms of violence against women have merited locations like the IT parks at Taramani, Madhya Kailash, Navalur Tidel Park and Sholinganallur, amongst others, to be in this list, according to a Times of India report.

Educational institutions like Stella Maris, Queen Mary's, Women's Christian College and Loyola are some of the other locations which shall also be converted into safe zones. Around 300 slum areas, which have been reported as unsafe will also be getting safe zones.

Female students from these colleges have a positive attitude with regard to these safe zones.

The aim of the government is to

make the city for the women travellers within the city. For the 20% of the working women in the city, such establishments will make travelling safer as most of their work spaces are on the outskirts of the city.

However, some still feel that this move isn't addressing the real problem here.

According to Mahima Saji, a first year master's student at Loyola, "Though such zones are definitely a short term remedy, it definitely won't be making things better for the future. Women have learnt how to safe guard themselves against crimes but the honours is very rarely attributed to men who propagate such hatred and indecent behavior towards women. That must be changed."

The safe zones are to be funded by the Nirbhaya fund set up to support initiatives working towards safe-guarding women. These zones, armed with artificial



intelligence, are meant to make travelling safer for women during nighttime.

These zones shall be provided with multi-utility smart poles that have emergency and panic buttons.

Additional facilities proposed are internet connectivity along with zero-dark luminance areas which are to be connected with Chennai Corporation's Control through IoT (Internet of things) based intelligence, as according to Hindu article. This is meant to facilitate quick responses from enforcement agencies.

These zones, or clusters, also aim to equip women with information about the crimes that are rampant in specific locations so that they can take the required precautionary measures.

'2 out of 5 women suffer iron deficiency'

RIA KAPOOR

CHENNAI: At least two out of five pregnant women in Tamil Nadu struggle with acute iron deficiency, according to the recent data from pregnancy infant cohort monitoring evaluation by the National Health Mission in Tamil Nadu.

Even though the percentage of anemic expecting women in the State has come down to 44 per cent from the 55 per cent in 2005, there still remains an un-bridged gap between the present situation and the goal that the Tamil Nadu Government has set for their improvement.

The numbers come as a surprise after the initiative taken by the Tamil Nadu Government to prescribe free medicines and provide maternal and child care kits to expecting women.

However, according to Dr. G Divya, an obstetrician and gynaecologist at a primary health care centre in Chennai, the problem lies in the deep roots.

"There's a divide here too," she said, adding "One can see a difference between the rich and poor pregnant women. While the well off ones usually get through with ease, the poor are often left in despair."

According to her, awareness amongst the women also makes a difference.

"Most of the women who come to me do not find it important to take supplements even after being told regularly," she said.

She mentioned how deficiency during pregnancy becomes an issue because it affects the growth and development of the fetus. It also increases the chances of deformities developing in the child and even women suffering miscarriages in extreme cases.

Dr K. Renuka, assistant director of the Centre for Women Development and Research talked about how most pregnant women, especially in the rural areas did not get proper nutrition because of poor access.

"Despite our best efforts to plan proper diet plans for them, a large number of women can't be reached. We are still in the process of devising some mechanism through which we can help reach a large enough number to make a difference," she said.

The centre, with the help of the State government, is trying to reach out to women, especially in rural areas to create awareness about anemia and explaining to them the

importance of good diet and medication.

Many women are also believed to skip their medication and also avoid certain food items owing to myths and misconceptions.

"Some women feel that certain fruits will harm them and their babies. They also don't trust the free medicines provided by the government."

"It becomes very difficult to explain things to them in such cases," said Renuka.

This has not only resulted in increasing number of anemia cases amongst infants and toddlers but has also led to an increased maternal mortality rate over the years and is only growing to be a massive issue in the field of maternal healthcare.

Anemia is the late manifestation of deficiency of nutrient(s) needed for hemoglobin synthesis.

Most cases of anemia are due to inadequate supply of nutrients like iron, folic acid, vitamin B12, proteins, amino acids, vitamins A, C, and other vitamins of B-complex group, which are involved in the maintenance of the hemoglobin level.

According to an Indian Medical Report of 2006, in women, anemia may become the underlying cause of maternal mortality and prenatal mortality.

Anemia also results in an increased risk of premature delivery and low birth weights.

The Global Nutrition Report 2017 analyzed 140 countries at the World Health Assembly in Geneva.

The findings placed India at the bottom of the table with maximum number of women impacted with anemia in the world.

In India, more than half (51%) of all women of reproductive age have anemia.

According to a research article of 2012 by ISRN Public Health, socio-economic variables, for example being from a Scheduled Tribe or a Schedule Caste have been statistically significant and positively correlated of being anemic.

The low-economic status from the disadvantaged castes, which restricts their ability to purchase nutritious food, is the most likely contribution.

Economic factors such as being in paid employment and being from a higher wealth quintile are all significantly and negatively associated with iron-deficiency anemia as compared to women from the poorest wealth quintile.

Autorickshaw service by women and transgenders

RAJAT THAKUR

CHENNAI: MAuto, also known as Makkal Auto added hijab-clad women and transgenders into its fleet of 330 women drivers and launched 'W Pride' service which will allow passengers to select whether they want to ride with a male, female or transgender drivers.

The service was launched on February 27.

"The purpose of introducing the scheme was to enable passengers, especially women to choose their driver at any given point of the time," said Mansoor Ali Khan, founder and managing director of MAuto.

MAuto was launched in 2014 with the focus on hassle free commuting in nine cities including Chennai, Tiruchi, Madurai, Kanyakumari and Thoothukudi. This initiative was later turned into one that encouraged and empowered women.

"Now the idea is to provide people with an honourable way to earn their living," he added.

This online platform has all the features offered by other popular platforms like Ola and Uber. However, the availability of women and transgender drivers and the facility to select the driver makes it different from others.

All the newly recruited will wear khaki vests over their hijab or saree as part of their uniform.

Akhila, one of MAuto drivers, said, "This initiative will attract many women passengers and it will also ensure their safety during night travel."

Another driver Fariha Khatun said, "We work with dignity at MAuto. We are hopeful about the measures taken by the company."

Makkal Auto, not only provides a livelihood option for women in need but also makes the daily commute of women safe in the city.

"Initiatives like this can increase the involvement of women and transgenders in the spaces dominated by the men," said Sethu Lekshmi, a commerce teacher at Stella Maris College.

MAuto is becoming popular among the commuters in the city. Mansoor claims to have more than 30,000 registered users on its platform. He says it is one of the largest fleet with women drivers in India.

"The organization's focus is now also on encouraging its acceptance," said Mansoor.

MAuto is the first of its kind to employ women in a large fleet. The idea of MAuto was a successor of Namma Auto, started by Mansoor Ali Khan.

As reported for some personal reasons, Khan had to dissolve



A female Auto Driver | RAJAT THAKUR

Namma Auto started in Chennai even earlier than MAuto. But this didn't stop him from taking up the initiative and for the first time India, autos have a panic button and a video telecasting features.

Months after this Khan launched the 'Women Pride Ride' and has a wish of carrying this further all over India.

Here, a woman is trained in driving for three months.

There is no stringent timing to be followed by the women and a large sum is allotted for their insurance. Although no acceptance of tip is allowed personally, there's a tip box where a commuter can donate some amount, which is used by the union to fund education of their children.

There are two apps to this service, M-AUTO app for public to access and book auto-rickshaws and M-AUTO Pilot App for auto-rickshaw drivers who wish to become a part of this service.

SAMIKSHA GOEL

CHENNAI: Brands across Chennai tried to capitalise on International Women's Day by offering discounts and sales on their products.

Gift shops and florists geared up with custom made items and bouquets while online websites have discounted products across various categories, to boost sales on International Women's day on March 8.

Saraswati, a sales woman at Archies, Mylapore, said that the shop had stocked up on cards, calendars and bags but not many people have shown up looking for that.

"Only three to four people have bought the cards for women," she said.

"We expected people to come. There is a definite increase of sales on Valentine's Day, but Women's day does not evoke the same enthusiasm," she added.

L'oreal Paris, a make-up brand, has launched 'Worth It Week' from March 1 to 8 on Nykaa, a website where the customers could get exciting offers on women's products such as cosmetics, soaps and shower gels.

Nykaa offered a discount of 40 per cent on all its products for the big sale.

Women could avail discounts up to 20 per cent on items such as key chains, purses, bags, cushions and

bottles at Chumbak, a website, by using the code 'YOUOGGIRL20' on a purchase worth Rs 2995.

According to a report in The New Indian Express, VR Chennai is displaying the works of female entrepreneurs in its three-day Women's Bazaar from March 8 to 10. Everything from jewellery, food, organic items to furniture, décor will be available at this Bazaar.

Flipkart which is also offering discounts on a range of products during their sale on March 7 and 8 like smart phones, tablets, laptops and more. Flipkart had also offered no cost EMI options throughout the sale period.

"There was no substantial increase in sales. However, we were prepared with all kinds of flowers and cakes. It would have been a surprise if we had made profit," a worker at Ferns and Petals said.

Zomato, a food delivery app, is also offering multiple discounts and offers on behalf of the multiple restaurants that it is tied with.

Women are spoilt with options on this day to spoil themselves. However, amidst these sales and offers, the real meaning and reason behind the reason of celebrating this day seems to have been lost on most of us.

Rather than paying respects to the fight for gender equality, capitalism has reduced the day to a mere commercial holiday.

Turning the Cinderella pumpkin into a real tale

SAMIKSHA GOEL

CHENNAI: Three women who have been friends for six years turned business partners in the last quarter of 2017 when they opened Pumpkin Tales, a restaurant with an all women crew at Bheemanna Garden Street in Alwarpet.

Pumpkin Tales was established because of the shared passion among Raja Rajeshwari, Bhuvaneshwari and Chindi Varadarajulu to create a good dining space for the city people with healthy food, without compromising on taste.

Pumpkin Tales has a restaurant as well as a bakery and also offers catering for parties.

Chindi Varadarajulu, who is the creative chef of the restaurant, says she set up the first South Indian restaurant in Vancouver in 2003. She travelled across South India for her culinary tours and finally moved to Chennai where the idea of a restaurant came into being.

Varadarajulu took a year to create the menu. Some of the dishes are her original creations.

When Varadarajulu came up with the idea, Rajeshwari who was into real estate, got fascinated by the idea of three friends working together and creating a space where

fellow women could work.

Rajeshwari said "We wanted women to be in the forefront and so we decided to have an all girl crew."

"These girls are around 20-21; My son is of the same age, so they are like my children to me and that is how they are treated," she said.

A woman, who is also a friend of the three founders, was called upon to train the staff on how to deal with the guests.

"From the time a guest enters the door, the girls are trained to greet them with smile, take them to the table, talk about the menu and make them feel comfortable till they exit," said Rajeshwari.

Talking about the inclusion of men, she said the restaurant is doing great and she did not intend on including them in the serving staff anytime soon. However, she said, there are men who work in the kitchen.



Rajeshwari flaunting the words to empower women workers | SAMIKSHA GOEL

"Slow food, use of age old techniques and the effort that goes into every dish on the menu is what makes us stand out," said Rajeshwari.

According to Rajeshwari, they decided to name the restaurant Pumpkin Tales when they were thinking of an ingredient which could be used in multiple dishes, and

pumpkin came to their minds.

"We have pumpkin soup, pumpkin in main course and, in fact, desserts made of pumpkin," she said.

Sanoshi, a staffer at the restaurant said, "It's nice working here. We all (Staff) live together and have developed a bond, so work feels like home."

The restaurant, as a gesture of listening to women, put up a "Women's Wish Board" on International Women's Day last year. They intend on putting up the board this year as well.

"I have many good friends, and most of them are women. They are my champions, my fans, my biggest critics and my partners in crime. A lot of what I am today is because of them," said Chindi on the Instagram handle of Pumpkin Tales.

When asked about how it was that they manage to work so well, Rajeshwari said that, "We have an understanding despite of our differences, so we fight, we argue, but we always manage to reach to a common point. At the end of the day, this friendship is the reason which keeps us going."