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Revisiting Auschwitz after 75 years

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NREGA flawed, but a must

Economist Sudha Narayanan says it can transform society

AATREYEE DHAR

The importance of sustaining the NREGA programme at a time when the Centre is struggling to find funds left to sustain this comprehensive social protection scheme, was stressed by Dr. Sudha Narayanan, Associate Professor, Indira Gandhi Institute of Development Research (Mumbai). Delivering the T.G. Narayanan Memorial Lecture on Social Deprivation at the Asian College of Journalism on January 24, she said there were several issues plaguing the NREGA such as the imposition of Aadhar linked transactions for transferring wages to beneficiaries, lack of efforts to revise the basic wages which are even lower than the legal minimum wage and administrative rationing where not everyone who seeks work gets it.

Media reports have said that the Centre was on the verge of running out of funds for the NREGA programme. The Hindu reported that more than 96 per cent of the allocated money has already been spent or is needed to pay the pending dues, with less than Rs



Dr Sudha Narayanan

2,500 crore left to sustain the scheme for the next two months.

Dr Sudha Narayanan pointed out that the primary goal of NREGA was social protection for the most vulnerable people living in rural India by creating durable assets to deal with drought and floods, providing employment opportunities and empowering the marginalised.

Underlining the potential of NREGA in countering the economic distress in rural areas, she pointed that there has been a 9 per cent drop in rural consumption between 2011-12 and 2017-18 and unemployment rate at a three year high.

NREGA, she said, had dented historical class imbalances in Bihar and Tamil Nadu by enabling

workers, who depended on landlords, to earn a livelihood independently. NREGA was also leveraged to rehabilitate bonded labourers among the Sahariyas in Rajasthan.

As the Act prescribes that at least a third of all workers be women with the entitlement to at least 100 days of work at the household level within 5 kms of the village, around 47-48 per cent of workers on NREGA sites are women.

During her field survey in Tamil Nadu in 2008, she said she had observed how the scheme had empowered women by increasing their "credit worthiness", enabling them to pay off their debts or retrieve pawned gold, helping them to spend on children's health and education and household expenses.

States such as Tripura, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal had used the NREGA to provide work for even the differently-abled and the elderly by employing them in tasks such as watering newly built constructions and plantations. NREGA had reduced short-term distress

migration by 22 percent, increasing incomes and consumption expenditure and filling an important need for people during the lean season especially for the Dalits and Adivasis.

In Tripura, fish rearing in farm ponds was popular, she said. Recently, the government decided to use the NREGA to build one million ponds with dimensions of 20 metres by 20 metres by March 2018.

This move left out the intended beneficiaries in Tripura whose 1.5 acres of land couldn't accommodate the ponds.

In spite of epithets like "gravy train" and "digging holes" used by economists and other critics to run down NREGA, Dr Sudha Narayanan added that the scheme had been effective in enabling the generation of 29.88 billion person days of work at a total cost of Rs. 5633 billion as of Jan 2, 2020. "Despite the scale, however, expenditure on the NREGA has never exceeded 0.4 per cent of the GDP since inception and has usually hovered around 0.33 percent", she said.

A chain to break shackles



A human chain at Teynampet to mark solidarity with protests across the country against the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) | ANSHUL GUPTA

'Citizenship Act Amoral'

Justice (Retd) Shah slams attempts at Hindu state

ABHINAV CHAKRABORTY

The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) which discriminates against Muslims cannot be defended morally, said Justice A.P. Shah (Retd.) here on January 27.

"Those who speak of the CAA as benign and benevolent, they need to ask some questions. Why only religious persecution? Why only three countries? (Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan) Are Muslims always the persecutors and never the persecuted?" he added.

The former Chief Justice of the Madras and Delhi High Courts was speaking at a panel discussion on the CAA-NRC-NPR at the Music Academy here. N. Ram, Chairman of The Hindu Group of Publications, legal scholar Usha Ramanathan and journalist Rohini Mohan were also on the panel.

Quoting B.R. Ambedkar, who had remarked that minorities erupting can blow up the fabric of a State, Justice Shah said that he had always understood citizenship and nationality as unifying ideas.

"The India we live in today is totally opposite to the idea of a homogenous Hindu society, what Hindutva thinks India to be. Even the Constituent Assembly was 80 per cent Hindu but the idea of a religious State was unanimously rejected back then," he said.

According to him, the CAA was the first time that religion had been introduced as a basis for granting

citizenship, which was contrary to the idea of secularism enshrined in the basic structure of the Constitution.

N. Ram, who had earlier kicked off the discussion, felt that the protests at Shaheen Bagh in Delhi symbolised a "mass revolt against an unjust, outrageous piece of legislation".

"All this has provoked the government. The protests have gotten under their skin. Even the news media have suddenly found their voice, which is quite remarkable," he said.

Citing the attacks on students of Jamia Millia Islamia and Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, Ram said the authorities were indulging in repression by prohibiting public assembly through means such as the imposition of Section 144 (of the Code of Criminal Procedure) in many parts of the country. "While those protesting do have the upper hand right now, one cannot be complacent as even the other side is mobilising," he said.

Usha Ramanathan said that the National Population Register (NPR) was an attempt to create another Aadhaar-like database on citizens. "Every time there is a policy change, we have to stand in a queue. But every single time, we also get databased," she added.

Calling the NPR an illegal exercise if it was not under the CAA, Ms. Ramanathan said that the State was giving itself

extraordinary executive power through such measures. She also stressed that the idea of belonging was being taken over by executive control. "The idea of eminent domain (power of a State to put private property to public use) has now been extended to 'we' belonging to the State. But the State owes us, not the other way around," she said.

Rohini Mohan, who made a presentation on her ground reporting from Assam during the implementation of the National Register of Citizens (NRC) process, underlined the ordeal faced by people through instances of families across different communities.

"In one instance, this family showed me documents of land ownership, education certificates of two generations. Despite all these documents, they fear losing their citizenship," she said.

Ms. Mohan highlighted the different measures taken by successive state governments over time such as the establishment of the Border Police force and identification of 'doubtful voters' by electoral officers, that had exacerbated the political situation in Assam prior to the NRC. "All this was reduced to one solution in the end - throwing out outsiders as a silver bullet," she added.

Ms. Mohan described the functioning of the Foreigners Tribunals as being error-prone and biased against minorities.

Beach vendors at sea over licence

ANMOL ARORA

"I am distressed since they [the Corporation officials] told me that they will remove my stall," said Ilanchelian, one of the vendors at the Marina Beach.

He has been working at the beach for the last 25 years, selling soft drinks and water bottles. Now, he is uncertain about his future. He is one among many vendors waiting for the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) to come out clearly with its regulation plan and the Madras High Court (HC) to have its final say on the matter.

Earlier this month, the HC expressed its dismay over the GCC's plans to increase the number of licensed vendors on the Marina from 900 to 1352 and renting steel carts to them for Rs 100 per month. A division bench of Justices Vineet Kothari and R Suresh Kumar suggested that they should not be rented out for less than Rs. 5000 per month.

"When they say, pay Rs. 5000, they just mean to ask us to leave [from here]," Ilanchelian said. The GCC told him that he could keep a stall half the size of the current one



Uncertain Future: Marina hawkers sans license | ANMOL A.

at a rent of Rs. 100 but he cannot keep his stock in that small a size, he added.

Ilanchelian was worried that if his stall was removed, he would not be able to find work elsewhere. Ram Chander, who owns Rahul Pani Puri Stalls, said that if he could find a place, he would shift his stall.

"[I] got an ID from the Corporation two years back but now the Court is asking them to remove our stalls. Why did they

give us the ID then?" he wondered.

Chander, who earned Rs. 15000 last month, said that paying a rent of Rs. 5000 would not work as he had many household expenses including his children's education and house rent.

"Rs. 100 is not the problem but Rs. 5000 is going to be a big issue for us," Moideen, another vendor, said. They were still not sure, as the Corporation had not informed them clearly about their plans, he added.

"My body, my blood, my home

is Marina," he said, adding that he had worked there for 27 years, right from his childhood.

Uttam, a worker at one of the vendors, said that any plan to regulate vendors and limiting their number would be beneficial for those who get to stay, as it would boost their business. The business got divided in the presence of so many options.

Another worker, Kumar Manna, said that he heard that all the stalls that can not get a license would be removed after 29 February.

The regulation of vendors and hawkers at Marina is part of the GCC's plan to administer public spaces in the city.

Apart from that, the Madras HC is listening to a batch of PIL petitions regarding beautification of Marina Beach. The regulation of vendors and hawkers is one aspect of it.

Another major issue is the demand to shift the fishsellers on the Marina Loop Road to a proposed marketplace and to construct a footpath along the road.

The GCC on Wednesday said at the HC that it would take six weeks time to do the same.

Phones snatched

AMRUTHA KOSURU

Three cases of phone snatching were reported on January 27, 2020 near the CIT campus in Tharamani. All the incidents took place between 10:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m.

In one of the incidents, a student from Central Polytechnic College, Tharamani, was injured. According to the police, the robbers cut the victim's wrist, snatched his phone and ran towards the 2nd main road, Tharamani. The victim had to have four stitches on his wrist.

The incident took place at 11:00 a.m. near the Women's Polytechnic bus stand on the Rajiv Gandhi IT Expressway.

The second incident also involved a student from the same college. Both the incidents involved bike-borne robbers on the 4th Cross Street, Tharamani.

"We have collected CCTV footage. According to our analysis so far, the robbers are same for all the three events that occurred on Tuesday," said P.Aravindan, Crime Inspector, Kotturam. He also added that they were able to track the robbers' movement but were unable to catch them.

The police added that they will be increasing the patrol hours to prevent such incidents. People in the area have expressed their concern over the

increasing number of phone and chain thefts, especially near Modern Street in the 4th Cross Street, Tharamani.

"Phone snatching has become extremely common in the area since the past two years," said Abbas Hussain, who has a small mobile accessories shack near the Institute of Mathematical Sciences. "I have personally heard of seven cases that took place on this road, in January alone," he added.

Anbarasan, a resident of Tharamani, said that the police patrol only the OMR service road. They almost never come inside the streets, he said. "More often than not the robbers are unmasked. That is the kind of confidence the laws are giving them," he added.

Another resident Sashi Rekha said that if she has to walk till the main road which is near her house, she opts to take an auto due to the fear of bike-borne robbers. "In October, 2019, my phone was stolen. I haven't filed a complaint because it is a waste of our time. Neither will I get my phone back, nor will the robbers be caught," she added. Several localities including Rekha said that phone snatching cases are not reported to the police as the recovery chances are low. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, in 2016, the mobile phone recovery rate was at 66.9 per cent.

ANMOL ARORA

There are strong resonances today of the processes that culminated in the genocide of Jews and others in Nazi Germany and here the target group seems to be the Muslims, said Sashi Kumar, Chairman of the Media Development Foundation.

Kumar was participating in a panel discussion at the Asian College of Journalism (ACJ) here on Tuesday, after a two-day screening of Claude Lanzmann's Shoah, a 540 minute movie on the Holocaust.

The film was shown at ACJ in collaboration with Goethe-Institut, Chennai, as part of worldwide screening to mark the International Day for Holocaust Remembrance, observed on January 27 every year. The marathon documentary brought together interviews and narratives of survivors and even perpetrators of the genocide that killed almost six million Jews.

"You are decitizenising the Muslims," Kumar said, while drawing parallels with the Citizenship Amendment Act that excluded one religion. Referring to Shoah, he said it was uncannily similar and one cannot help but make connections with contemporary developments.

Helmut Schippert, Director of Goethe-Institut, talked about the rise of the right

Shoah reopens 'othering' debate



[from left] Uma Vangal, Helmut Schippert and Sashi Kumar | ANMOL A.

wing and right extremist views in his own country. In three federal states of Germany, a right extremist party won 25 per cent of the votes, he said, while also giving the example of Marine Le Pen in France.

After the war and the partition of the country into East Germany controlled by the Soviet Union and West Germany controlled by the rest of the Allied Forces, the children reproached their parents for doing what they did, he said.

The accountability of Germany owed itself to a complex process, involving

Nuremberg trials, and reeducation programs including forced viewing of the films throwing light on the country's war crimes, Schippert said.

Germany also maintained a civil relationship with Israel, along with making symbolic monuments for all the regions and nations that they occupied as part of their reconciliatory approach and memory culture, he added.

Uma Vangal, Media Analyst and Adjunct Faculty at ACJ, said that Lanzmann provided an interesting trilingual framework in the film, where he

utilised the editing strategy of keeping the questions, answers, and their translations a part of its runtime.

"Every time he is taking the train, we are taking the train with packed people," she said.

Adding to that, Kumar said that dual translation allowed the audience to dwell on the scene and get to the truth. "It is dictated by the pace in which the first person account is narrated," he said.

"It engages you because it engages you," he said.

Calling Lanzmann's communication strategies "mind blowing", Schippert said that the film never made much money. It was finally recognised with an honorary Golden Bear at the Berlin Film Festival in 2013.

As to the question of intrusive interview techniques employed by the director, Vangal said that it was a tactic adopted to tell the stories of the people, and not to shame or hurt them.

Being born in a French Jew family, Lanzmann wanted to engage with what happened during the Holocaust, she added.

In Israel, they use the word 'shoah' instead of holocaust as the latter means sacrifice and they do not see it as one, she said. The Hebrew meaning of the word 'shoah' is calamity.

Empty spaces, closed doors No room for pedestrians on Chennai's footpaths

Few patients in Govt. multi-speciality hospital on Anna Salai

ABHINAV C.

Nearly six years after it was inaugurated as a hospital that would have state-of-the-art facilities, the corridors of Tamil Nadu Government Multi Super Speciality Hospital at Omandurar Government Estate on Anna Salai are deserted. "Only when the Rajiv Gandhi Government General Hospital (at Central) has more people than they can keep, the patients are sent here. That is why I brought my mother here," said Ashok, a Maduravoyal resident whose mother is an in-patient in the Vascular Surgery ward.

Deepa, who works at the cafeteria inside the hospital building said, "Not all people come here. Only when it's something important, like something happens to the heart or the brain, that they come here."

First envisioned and built as the new two-block Legislative Assembly complex by then-Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi at an initial cost of over Rs 700 crore, the successive J. Jayalalitha-led AIADMK government decided to shift the Assembly back to Fort St. George and convert the building into a multi-speciality hospital.

The hospital was opened to the public in February 2014 as a tertiary care hospital similar to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences. The initial 400-bed capacity was to be expanded to 500 beds later.

Other facilities such as LED signboards and water dispensers on every floor were promised. Fast forward six years, all that remain of



Inaugurated in 2014, the Tamil Nadu Government Multi Super Speciality Hospital near Chintadripet lacks basic amenities like toilets and water dispensers. | ABHINAV CHAKRABORTY

the water dispensers are the signboards plastered across the walls with holes drilled into them, indicating the space that had been allotted.

Papers strewn across desk panels below the signboards indicated a makeshift nurses' station.

The only amenity omnipresent across the seven-storied building was the set of elevators. As one moves beyond the ground floor which is open to out-patient departments, all one sees are empty corridors and an endless series of closed doors.

On more than one floor, the housekeeping staff outnumber the patients and visitors.

Some departments in the first two floors dedicated primarily to

out-patients, such as Physiotherapy, Nephrology and Oncology remain shorn of either hospital staff or visitors.

Hospital officials declined comment, citing lack of authorisation from the Directorate of Medical Education.

Vikram, a first-year medical student at the adjoining Government Medical College Hospital, felt the lack of personnel in many departments was because the hospital was only six years old.

"A new college hospital building with more departments was inaugurated only a few days ago. Maybe we will see more people as new facilities come up," he said.

Every floor has six doors labelled as toilets with three each for

men and women, but the ones that worked were present only on the ground, fifth and sixth floor.

"I work on the third floor cafeteria but to use the toilet, I have to go all the way down," said Deepa.

Most in-patients were on the top two floors, which had the general wards. But family members of patients and visitors outside the wards pointed at a large plastic barrel inside the toilet as the only source of water that they could use throughout the day, since the flush in the toilets did not work.

"People on these two floors use the common toilets inside the general wards itself. The toilets outside are not proper," said a female employee at the Central Library on the sixth floor.

ANEESA PA

Chennai footpaths have not become pedestrian-friendly even two months after the Madras High Court ordered Greater Chennai Corporation officials to remove hawkers and vendors from footpaths across the city.

Many footpaths across the city are either occupied by hawkers or are used to park vehicles.

The footpath in front of Egmore Government Hospital on Pantheon Road is filled with different carts, especially selling utilities and food. The rush makes it harder to spot the main gate of the hospital.

Vijayalakshmi, who came to the hospital from Nungambakkam, said that it was tough to walk through the footpath because of the large number of carts and rush.

They should increase the width of the footpath, she said.

P.Surendran (45), an auto driver at Thiruvanniyur complained that accidents were common on East Coast Road because of the lack of footpaths. "People are using the main road to walk and traffic police only show up in the evening and morning," he said.

At the same time, people at Chepauk complain that the footpath along Bells Road is being used to dump waste and to park bikes.

While hearing a Public Interest Litigation filed by 60-year-old chartered accountant Vandana Zachariah seeking direction to the Corporation and police officials to



Footpaths in Chepauk (left) and Egmore (right) | ANEESA PA



lay good pavements across the city and maintain them without encroachments, with a special reference to NSC Bose Road, the Madras High Court on November 13, 2019 asked GCC Commissioner G Prakash to explain why pavements were not user-friendly.

Victor Gnanaraj, Executive Engineer, Greater Chennai Corporation, said GCC was taking care of construction and maintenance only.

"Other departments have to take care of encroachment issues," he said, adding that every footpath was now covered with bollards to prevent parking.

A special committee appointed by the High Court was working with the police to remove en-

croachments, he said.

He added that a proposal for 60 new footpaths had been approved and work would be finished within eight months.

Meanwhile, vendors fear they will lose their livelihood if they are forced to moved out.

Valliymmal (59), who has a stand selling buckets and cups on the footpath in front of the Egmore Government Hospital said that she had no other source of income.

"If the corporation asks us to leave what else I can do, we have no other way," she said.

A 50-year-old woman, who sells fruits along the Poonamallee High Road, said that they hid their baskets whenever the police come.

Kidney patients unhappy despite free services

ANITA SHRESTHA

Though the government is providing free dialysis service to poor people, low-quality service, misbehavior by technicians and lack of adequate human resources were disappointing the patients, says Vasundhara Raghavan, founder of Kidney Warriors Foundation (KWF).

"People who went to government hospitals and dialysis centres are complaining about the insensitive behaviour of technicians and health workers," said Raghavan while speaking at the 27th Tamil Nadu Kidney Research Foundation (TANKER) Annual Charity and Awards Nite 2020.

She said that the nature of each patient is different and the health workers should understand their health condition. "Kidney patients were already in trauma because of

their health condition and financial problem. They also face social discrimination and feel neglected. In such a situation, health workers should provide them with good treatment along with kind behaviour," she said.

KWF has been providing emotional and physical comfort to the patient. It also focuses on guidance on a diet that has to be followed by the patient to avoid problems.

She said that there are 1,200 nephrologists in the country, which is not enough. "Instead of spending a lot of funds on dialysis, the government should focus more on kidney transplant," she said. "The Organ Transplantation Act has some restrictions which need to be simplified. People do not know what they need. We need to lobby the government to amend the law."

Almost 2.5 lakh people die of kidney failure in the country every

year. It is the third-largest killer after malignancy and heart disease.

The Pradhan Mantri National Dialysis Programme was rolled out in 2016 as part of the National Health Mission for provision of free dialysis services to the poor. Every year, about 2.2 lakh new patients at end-stage Renal Disease, a gradual loss of kidney function, get added in India resulting in additional demand for 3.4 crore dialysis every year.

According to government data, with approximately 4950 dialysis centres, largely in the private sector, less than half the demand is met with existing infrastructure. Dialysis costs Rs 2000 at a time, resulting in an annual expenditure of Rs 3 lakh to Rs 4 lakh.

Dr George Abraham, consultant nephrologist and founder of TANKER, said that 17 per cent of Indians were living with chronic kidney diseases and 20 per cent have high blood pressure, but people are not aware of it and failed to get early treatment.

"Early detection is necessary to avoid chronic kidney disease. Those who have hypertension, previous kidney disease, diabetes and family history of diabetes and consuming drugs should compulsorily do the kidney test," he said.

TANKER Foundation has provided 318,593 free dialysis and subsidized dialysis for 1562 patients. It has eight subsidized dialysis units with a total of 126 dialysis stations.



Deluxe and General Metropolitan Transport Corporation buses at Chennai Central: The affordable luxuries of Chennaites. | ANJALY RAJ

MTC AC buses back on road

ANJALY RAJ

After a year of hiatus, the Metropolitan Transport Corporation (MTC) started operating air-conditioned (AC) buses on select routes from January 10 in the city. With eleven such buses operating here, it has become a matter of luxury for the commuters.

Poomullai, a 20-year-old student, said she was totally unaware that the AC buses had started operating again in the city. "I travel daily by bus, in the past few days, I have not spotted any MTC AC bus," she said.

According to MTC, there is only one AC bus plying on 19B route. Early last year, 100 AC Volvo buses stopped operating in Chennai because of maintenance issues. MTC regularly cut the number of services because it was unable to renew the annual maintenance contract. According to a The Times of India

(TOI) report, 50 new AC buses were expected to hit the roads in August 2019.

Ayya Swami, a worker at the Thiruvanniyur bus depot, said, "Only two buses on 91 route operate from here right now." These two buses run every hour.

"Another seven air conditioned buses are expected to come soon," said Sarvanan, who has been working at the Thiruvanniyur bus depot for five years.

An assistant engineer at the Public and Development (P&D) department, MTC, said, "48 AC buses of Ashok Leyland are proposed to be operated in the city.

11 AC buses are already operating, of which six run on the 570 route." Two AC buses are operating from Thiruvanniyur to Tambaram (91) and Broadway to Tambaram (21G), and one on T Nagar to Keelambakkam (19B). The P&D department worker said the sales are

expected to increase for the AC buses, as people working in IT sector would prefer AC buses to normal and deluxe MTC buses. "The remaining air conditioned buses will be running in a few days," he said.

Vinayagam, an IT worker, thinks AC buses should not be a luxury but rather should run more frequently on the roads. "AC buses were running in the city till last year, I have not seen any AC bus this year," he said.

Thamizharasa, a 22-year-old commuter who was also unaware about the operations of the new AC buses, said, "I thought only deluxe buses are there, apart from general MTC buses."

Many commuters remained clueless when asked about the AC buses coming back to the town. Most of them travel on the routes 570 and 91, where the AC buses are operating.

Tourism fair attracts agents and hoteliers

ABHIRUPA KUNDU

As many as 94 tourism companies from India as well as abroad participated in the Travel and Tourism Fair (TTF) held in Chennai on January 24, 25 and 26 at the Chennai Trade Centre, Nandambakkam.

The fair connected the tour operators and hoteliers and chiefly provided scope for business, said Aishwarya Lunani, project executive at the fair.

Sunil Sharma, senior manager at the Nepal Tourism Board, said, "People in India are more inclined to go on pilgrimage, so we come here to expand our business. People generally go on pilgrimage to Pashupatinath and Mukhtinatn or for trekking."

"This year the numbers of bookings were less compared to last year. People now have smart phones and the information is at their fingertips. So shows and fairs like this need to come up with innovative ideas to attract customers," added Sharma.

R. Rajashekar, Corporate sales head at the Wildplanet Resorts in the Nilgiris, said, "Bookings were made over the counter, mainly travel agents and corporates, we showcased our property."

Tourism companies from Taiwan, Philippines, Greece and Nepal and from Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Goa, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Assam, Odhisa and Tripura had stalls offering tour packages.

"The 'business to business' hours are from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. The counters open for all customers after 2 p.m.," said Gopu Chandran, manager at the Rain Drops business hotel, Kerala.

Debashrita Roy, who had come with her two-year-old daughter and husband to the fair, said that she wanted to visit Andaman and Nicobar Islands but couldn't talk to the tour operators as they were busy in business meetings.

Shiva Guru, a tour agent at the SG group of Travel Hub said that profit was less as they had to invest a large amount to buy the space for their stalls. The smaller stalls cost Rs 40,000, while the larger ones cost Rs 70,000.

Santosh Kumar G, a customer representative executive who has been working with the Karma Group, said their expectations were met with 20 bookings a day. He added that they were looking forward to the next fair in Bangalore.

The fair is held in intervals of two to three months in different cities all over India.



SILENT KILLER: Close to 2.5 lakh people in India die of kidney failure every year. | TANKER FOUNDATION

Against all odds, transwoman carves out her own identity

AMRUTHA KOSURU

Aruna Rani, a 58-year-old transwoman who has been running a small food cart, hid her gender and identity in oversized trousers and shirts for over 40 years.

Aruna sells a variety of dishes such as Chicken Biryani, Sambar Rice, Medhu Vada and more. Most of the time Aruna cooks the dishes herself. There are also four people assisting her at the cart.

"I want to die working," she said, explaining that she's a workaholic and has never once begged or turned to sex work. "I have always depended on my own money," she said.

Aruna has previously worked as a cook, caretaker, driver and many more. She's done all the jobs without disclosing her gender.

While she is at work in her shop

situated near Indira Nagar Bridge, several men pass lewd comments at Aruna. "The one that hurts me the most is when they say that I am fit only to do sex work," she said.

Often, she also has difficulties in renting a house. "Most of the house owners see me as a curse," she said. After a lot of difficulty, she finally found a place to stay in Sashtri Nagar, Adyar.

Aruna has also often been criticised for being a workaholic by other transwomen, especially sex workers. According to her, several transwomen sex workers see her as a threat and are amazed with the amount of respect she is treated with in society.

Nevertheless, Aruna has never stopped working and fending for herself. The food cart was donated by Cheer, an NGO based in Chennai. They implement projects spe-

cially designed for a particular target group. Their first project is related to the economic and social rehabilitation of the transgender persons.

It brings her a daily profit of Rs. 2,000-3,000. Although her life was initially filled with hardships, she is happy to stand out in society.

"I have worked very hard. I have adopted two boys and two girls over a period of time," she said. She also added that by working, she also helps provide for the four men who are working under her in the food cart.

Aruna Rani, who was originally named Arun Kumar by her parents, was aware of her distinct behaviour since her pre-teens. She particularly loved to dance and sing. Her parents despised her behaviour and hence beat her. But Aruna's love for dance never faded away.



Aruna Kumari with her adopted son Karthick (16)

Think tanks need to pull up their socks

ANSHUL GUPTA

Lack of interaction between researchers and policy makers is why think tanks in India still don't have much contribution in policy decisions, according to Mr. Sashi Nair, Director and Editor, Press Institute of India.

Speaking at the seminar "The Future of Think Tanks and Policy Advice" at Taramani here on Thursday, Mr. Nair talked about the need for ideas, human resources, funding and autonomy for think tanks to function properly. He also stressed the need for improvement in quality of reports and study material.

"The research needs to have more rigour in it. Think tank reports of other countries, especially the United States, are rigorous and are based on extensive amount of research," he added.

Earlier during the welcome address, Cmde. R.S. Vasan, former Regional Commander, Coast Guard Region (East) and Director of Chennai Centre for China Studies (C3S), mentioned that in terms of number of think tanks, the US leads with 1871. Although India is second, the number of think tanks is only 509, less than one-third of that of the US.

But think tanks don't really matter in the current Indian political scenario, according to Dr. V.S. Sambandan, Chief Administrative Officer, The Hindu Centre for Politics and Public Policy.

During the discussion titled "Think Tanks and Emerging Power Narratives", he said, "There was a time when there was a Fabian Society Model in United Kingdom in 1885, which continues to exist now as well. Fabian Society identified itself as left of centre but it engaged with the people, which the current government does not."

He added that we first have to accept that the pendulum of ideology was on rightward swing as far as the global political atmosphere was concerned.

Mr. R.K. Radhakrishnan, Associate Editor at Frontline, concurred saying that the world all over was living in a fascist regime, whether it was in Italy, Ecuador, Europe, India, China or the latest being the emergence of Gotabaya Rajapaksa in Sri Lanka.

"Everybody looks at the US as the leader of democracy but everyone is seeing what is happening there. The President refuses to submit himself before legal proceedings, holding himself above the law," he added.

Bringing think tanks into the picture, Mr. Radhakrishnan said that Indian think tanks, despite availability of huge resources at their disposal, are not able to realise their potential.

The role of media and journalists has become very crucial in the current political scenario, said Col. Hariharan VSM (Retd.), former Officer in the Intelligence Corps and a Member of C3S, who was moderating the session "Role of Media".

Mr. Radhakrishnan said that we have moved away from the time when media used to take a stand. "It is now more about the stand taken by an individual journalist," he added.

On social media playing a part in devising extreme opinions and becoming an obnoxious platform for journalists, he felt social media bullies making threats was the new normal in India.

"It is necessary to start having a dialogue instead of targeting a particular individual. One should target the stance or viewpoint rather than the individual," he said.

Mr. Peer Mohamed, Senior Editor and Founder-CEO of digital media platform ipoddu.com, said that there were some people who wanted to deepen the division between communities and those who want to deepen the dissent.

"There are some platforms (on the web) that wait for the public to express their opinion. That is the reason that credibility of media institutions has been questioned again and again," he said.

Mr. N. Sathiyamoorthy, head of the Observer Research Foundation (Chennai Initiative), said that the credibility of institutions was more important than truth telling these days. "Media has to play the role of mediator, policy advocate and act as a fact-checking machinery, as they are the ones who can get the reaction of the government on the spot," he added.



Marching ahead: Hundreds of female police personnel marching in the parade on Kamaraaj Salai Road near the Marina beach as a part of Republic Day celebrations in the city

ABHIJIT PAUL

Celebrations of 71st Republic Day

ABHIJIT PAUL

An Indian Air Force helicopter dropped flowers as it flew over the platform where Tamil Nadu Governor Banwarilal Purohit, hoisted the national flag near the Mahatma Gandhi Statue on the Marina to mark the Republic Day celebrations in Chennai.

Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswamy, Deputy Chief Minister O. Paneerselvam and other government officials were among those who witnessed the parade that showcased India's military might and the state's rich cultural heritage.

Personnel from the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, Central paramilitary forces, and the Tamil Nadu police marched past the cheering crowd in tight formations in accompaniment to music.

The parade was led by the Wing Commander Praveer Shukla.

Students from various schools and colleges and artistes made spectacular performances for the gathering.

Tableaux mounted on trucks displayed the achievements of the various State Government departments such as the Adi Dravidar and Tribal Welfare, Welfare of Differently Aabled Persons, Social Welfare and Nutritious Meal Programme, Tamil Nadu Village Habitation Improvement Scheme,

Information and Technology Department of the State, 'Amma Patrol' for women safety, Road safety programme.

People from several parts of the city cheered the parade with the national flag. Some had even painted the national flag on their faces which added more colour to the occasion.

However, Manimegalai (68), who came with her grandsons from Neelankarai, said, "There are seating arrangements for the authorities and their family members, but for general people, they could have ensured some shade because at least for 2 hours, we have to stand here under the sun."

Manimegalai said there was more enthusiasm in their times for the Republic Day and Independence Day celebrations and that the present generation lacked that kind of excitement.

Harish (32), one of Manimegalai's grandsons contradicted her: "I try to come here every year with my grandmother and also, I like the harmony of the performance of the dancers which attracts me the most". Raghavan (52), a resident of Chennai, who works in a multinational company in Delhi, said that after a couple of decades, he managed to observe the R-Day celebration and that he felt nostalgic to be a part of the mass.

"Our constitution was written to



A tableau showcasing the Information & Technology Department of the Tamil Nadu Government.

ABHIJIT PAUL

strengthen India as a country while keeping the diversified nature in mind."

"I hope despite all ideological differences, the political parties and the common people will keep the faith in the Constitution and act in a positive way."

"Besides, Chennai never fails to amaze me and here, you will find people from the age of 7 to 70," Raghavan added.

Gobindh M. (27), who studies mass communication in a private college, said that he came here to volunteer as meeting with new people was part of his job.

Sudhakar (47), who came with his two sons and wife said the experience was terrible as it was tough to go through the crowds. He said that the seating space was not sufficient for the people who came to witness the celebration.

Bridging policy & practice

ABHIJIT PAUL

Every G20 summit comes up with new economic policies but fails to implement the proposed financial architecture, former Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Finance K. Subramanian said here on Thursday.

"After World War II, there was total global optimism that economic reforms will be possible by following the U.S. economic model. Unfortunately, sharing of global wealth and welfare started to move in a one-sided way, particularly towards the western countries," he added.

Subramanian, currently Treasurer of the think-tank Chennai Centre for China Studies (C3S), was chairing a panel discussion titled "Think Tanks and the New Security and Economic Architecture" at the Press Institute of India, Taramani.

Focusing on the new economic architecture, S Sundeeep Kumar, a Ph.D research scholar at Madras University said he preferred referring the architecture as an evolving economy.

Kumar said that between the late 1970s and early 1980s, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) became the mantra as the nations across the world, whose economic flow was restricted only to certain sectors and domestic arenas or to the government, opened up for expansion

of their wealth.

According to Sundeeep, such globalisation was largely accepted by several nations initially but on the other hand, economical imbalance and lack of parity was observed.

In the Sub-Saharan, African and Latin American countries, the economic growth rate dipped down from 5.6 per cent to 2.1 per cent, 4.8 per cent to 1.7 per cent and 5.9 per cent to 3.1 per cent respectively.

"Sudden spike of money led to inequality, rampant corruption and political dissatisfaction. Fuelled by all these factors and domination by the western world, the 2008 financial crisis decisively shifted the global economic course. Countries are now convinced that protectionism was the way forward and Trump, Brexit are popular examples," Sundeeep added.

Col. Hariharan VSM (Retd.), formerly of the Intelligence Corps and a member of C3S, said that strategic think tanks should be re-validated to discover new ideas.

He expressed concern over the Asian strategic think tanks, given that the type of warfare had changed considering on three main factors - command and control, firepower and mobility.

"In military services, the role of think tanks is a vital factor, but there are a lot of empty spaces where the authorities concerned re-

main reluctant and give less importance to the think tanks. On the other hand, think tanks are not delivering their perspectives, there are fewer military personnel. Also, we lack the mentality of looking forward and gathering lessons from our past," he said.

Dr. Ashik J. Bonofor, Assistant Professor of Political Science at the Madras Christian College and Associate member of C3S, said spending lots of money on weapons and research for new age weapons have been adopted by many nations.

According to him, this trend of expansion instead of protecting own territory, was a matter of concern.

"State centrism is no longer relevant in the present era and we are moving forward to a multi-windowed age. International political economy, human rights and war studies are subjects that should be focused on and think tanks have direct relations with all these fields.

But rather than focusing on qualitative work in academics, we are spending more time on quantitative work," he said.

He added that for think tanks to bridge the gap between theory and application and perform better in their respective fields, they should be given more internship opportunities that help them to improve their knowledge.

Locals throng metro but where is the event?

Visitors were puzzled as CMRL event did not follow the schedule

ANJALY RAJ

One of the events of the Chennai Cherish Musical Week, organised by the Chennai Metro Rail Limited (CMRL), did not take place as scheduled here on Thursday.

As per the CMRL schedule, the 'Chennai Kalai Theru Vizha' (formerly Urur Olcott Kuppam Vizha) team was due to perform along with others in a metro train from Alandur to Chennai Central station and back.

The CMRL is collaborating with several artists and organisa-

tions to give the people of Chennai a glimpse into the world of music and arts of Tamil Culture. The musical week commenced on January 24 and will go on till February 2.

Visitors, who came to witness the stand-up comedy of Abhishek and music performance of Bindumalini, were left with nothing but questions. Some CMRL workers had no idea about this event and they were clueless about the musical week.

While the Alandur CMRL staff said the performance would take place at Chennai Central metro sta-

tion, the Central metro staff said that it was taking place on the street outside. The performances did not take place at either of these locations.

On further questioning, a CMRL staff member there said that the performers were denied permission to perform in the metro from Alandur.

"They are performing in the metro coming from Ashok Nagar," this staff member said.

A 21-year-old student, Archita, coming from Keelambakkam, said, "I travelled from Alandur to Cen-

tral, to witness Bindumalini performing, but I am going back with nothing but disappointment."

"I waited for the metro from Ashok Nagar to come, but there is no point staying here now," said another man, who came especially for the performances of Bindumalini and Preethi Bhardwaj. He was disappointed after finding out that they did not take place in that metro either. While some who gathered at the Central metro station were puzzled, majority of the commuters had no idea about the ongoing musical week.

Small or big, every theatre in the city is facing dip in footfalls

Streaming of films on OTT platforms within a month and PVR's monopoly is affecting business of film theatres

ANSHUL GUPTA

A bespectacled man sits in his armchair, filling the sales and admissions book at the SDC Anna Cinemas office on Anna Salai. Akbar Sharif (66), the assistant manager at the cinema, has been working at the theatre since its inception in 1973.

"Since we are a single-screen theatre, we have a limited audience as predominantly we play Tamil films. But our customer base is strong, since our prices are lower compared to any other theatre in this area," he said.

The first priority for a filmgoer has always been the ticket price. Even though last year's reduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) on ticket prices did help, but multiplexes, especially the ones housed inside malls, still have steep ticket prices.

And if a family has to go out for a movie night at a multiplex, bud-

get becomes a big issue.

This brought in the demand for film streaming as soon as they have exhausted their theatrical run. Since online platforms are paying huge sums to production houses to buy digital rights, they have to showcase the film to garner audiences.

In a report by The News Minute last month, Tamil Nadu theatre owners felt that a big star's film shouldn't release on over-the-top (OTT) platforms within 100 days of the theatrical release.

The theatre owners noted that films such as Jallikattu (Malayalam) and Asuran (Tamil) were out on Amazon Prime within 30 and 35 days of their release respectively, which in their view affected the customer's thought process before buying a ticket.

But Janeki Raman, manager at Casino Cinemas, another single screen theatre on Anna Salai, said that if a person is spending on Netflix (up to Rs. 800 a month) and



Old is Gold: One of the oldest theatres in Chennai, Devi Cineplex still sees audience thronging it in large numbers

ANSHUL GUPTA

Amazon Prime Video (Rs. 999 a year) subscriptions, then surely one can spend Rs. 100-120 to experience it in a theatre.

Another factor that affects older and smaller theatres is the opening of new theatres.

Curiosity and freshness attract audiences and other theatres in the nearby areas feel the pinch, according to V. Chakravarti, team leader at INOX theatre located inside Citi Centre mall on R.K. Salai.

"When Express Avenue at Royapettah opened, it was new, fancy and a huge mall"

"With a brand new theatre with excellent sound and projection quality, people thronged it like anything. Escape Cinemas, now owned by PVR, took away almost 50 per cent of our footfall," he added.

Chakravarti also said that to improve the theatre's sound and projection quality, it has to undergo renovation.

"If the mall is renovated, only

then we will get renovated," he said.

PVR Cinemas, the multiplex chain, enjoys a monopoly as far as footfall and revenue share are concerned as they already have six theatres and a seventh is under construction at the Chennai Airport.

It also owns SPI Sathyam and Escape Cinemas in Royapettah.

On the other hand, Devi Cineplex, one of the oldest theatres in Chennai nearing its 50th anniversary, still retains its customer base, according to C.K. Subramani, Assistant Manager and Cashier at the cinema.

"This 2500-seater (4 screens) cinema hall has been here for ages and enjoys a good rapport with B and C audience, who want to have the multiplex experience but also don't want to spend a lot," added Subramani.

But he also admits that availability of more entertainment avenues

and exposure of audiences to cinema from all around the world literally in their hands has made them choosy regarding what to watch in the theatre and what not to.

Monopolization by PVR Cinemas may have affected other multiplex chains such as INOX and AGS in Chennai, but it does not necessarily affect business or footfalls in the single screen theatres, according to Mr. Sharif.

Theatres like Devi and Kamala, because of their familiarity with the audience due to prolonged existence are still thriving.

"A person with a family of four arriving in a car won't come to a single screen," he said.

On the other hand, Mr. Subramani believes the boom of OTT platforms has put a seed of doubt in the mind of filmgoers.

"But theatre experience will not go out of fashion and is still irreplaceable," he said.

REMEMBERING AUSCHWITZ

Tales of horror from the Holocaust

A marathon chronicle of death and despair

ABHIMANYU HAZARIKA

There are multiple scenes throughout the over 550-minute documentary that consist of silent shots panning over the 'horror' chambers where millions of Jews were assembled, undressed, paraded in chains and eventually gassed to death. Shoah, shown at the Asian College of Journalism as part of the worldwide screening to mark the 75th anniversary of the Russian liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp is replete with the accounts of survivors, camp workers and even some perpetrators.

The Goethe Institute, a German cultural institute at Chennai's Max Mueller Bhavan, organised the screening in collaboration with the ACJ at the MS Subbalakshmi Auditorium on the college campus in a marathon session that ran over nine hours.

Shoah's director, Claude Lanzmann was initially commissioned by the Israeli Government to produce two hours of content over a period of 18 months, of what was to basically be a documentation of the Holocaust from the Jews'

point of view. As more and more footage starting getting compiled however and the deadline extended, Lanzmann took it upon himself to compile something substantial for the ages even as issues of finance, of tracking down survivors, and death threats, persisted.

Deliberately devoid of historic or archival footage, the documentary progresses as a series of eyewitness accounts of Jewish survivors, Poles and officials. Only in a couple of cases did Lanzmann use a hidden camera, resulting in grainy footage. One of these was footage of an SS (Nazi paramilitary organization) officer, Franz Suchomel. The interviewees in such scenes were either obscured or shown through the eyes of technicians handling the recording. The testimonies were unscripted.

Juxtaposing footage of what now exists of the extermination camps at Chelmno, Auschwitz and Treblinka with that of witness accounts, Shoah's retelling of the atrocities of the entire Holocaust process unfurls through accounts of the Jews' ghettoisation, demoralisation and eventual extermination on an unprecedented, mass scale.

The process, as the documentary reveals, was one that had the inevitable complicity of the working class masses who had popularly elected the Nazi regime. Factory workers and regular citizens overnight, even through times of drought and epidemics, were convinced that the extermination of Jews would address their issues. Overnight, manufacturing units became slaughter houses and public transport turned into 'cattle trucks' in which the Jews marked for extermination were ferried across Europe.

It is the anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp by Soviet 75 years ago (on January 27) that has reopened the debate on anti-semitism - prejudice against the Jewish community - across the globe, especially parts of then occupied Europe.

On the request of the team behind the Berlin International Literature Festival, cultural institutions around the world screened Lanzmann's work, even as survivors in different countries met to mark the liberation.



Henryk Gawkowski was a locomotive driver at the Treblinka railway station from where Jews were transported to the death camps nearby. Gawkowski estimated that he transported 18,000 Jews. | Wikipedia

Haunting memories from Chelmno

ANITA SHRESTHA

"A little white house
Lingers in my memory
Of that little white house
I dream each night..."

'Shoah' begins with this song sung by Simon Srebnik, a survivor, as he takes a boat ride on the Narew River at Chelmno, one of the places where the Jews were exterminated by the Nazis during the Second World War.

Srebnik goes back to his past and shares the —horrors of the Holocaust. He goes to dense woods and fields to show the filmmakers where the gas chambers and ovens were located and how Jews were burnt alive.

As many as 400,000 Jews were murdered in two separate periods: December 1941 to spring 1943,



Simon Srebnik | BERLINALE

and June 1944 to January 1945. Srebnik was then 13 and a half years old. He was a toy that sang to amuse the German soldiers. He said he sang as people were being killed. He couldn't cry but his heart wept.

Srebnik was reportedly shot and left to die in the Chelmno camp before he was rescued and given medical treatment by the invading Russian soldiers.

Another survivor Michael Podchlenbnik never wanted to remember that incident. He said that

on the third day he reached Chelmno, he saw his wife and children dead. He placed them in a grave and asked the soldiers to kill him. But the SS men told him that he was strong enough to work and he wouldn't be killed yet.

Like Podchlenbnik, Itzhak Dugin, a survivor of Vilna, shares the same kind of sorrow. When the last mass grave was dug in January 1944, Dugin was also among hundreds of Jews deployed to dig the grave. There, among the bodies of the Jews gassed to death earlier, he found his mother, sisters and their kids. He said that he recognized them from their clothes and the time they were murdered was winter. So their bodies were preserved, clear enough to be recognized.

Dugin said that when the bodies

were not burned completely, the 'special squad' of Jewish men were forced to dig the Jews to top of the others in the pits.

The squad members were not given any tools to dig the mass graves. They had to use their hands.

"When we dug the first grave, we couldn't help it and burst into tears. But the Germans almost beat us to death," he said.

Bronislaw Falborski, who drove the 'vans' in which the Jews were gassed to death, said people were herded from the synagogue to the railway station in Kolo. Old people were kept first in the cattle cars and then the young Jews were loaded onto the wagons that took them to Chelmno.

The Jews were herded into the first floor of the Chelmno castle

and told to undress. Then they were made to board vans which were filled with exhaust from trucks and even a military tank.

The vans would be driven slowly to give time for the Jews to die. The bodies tumbled out and were pushed into pits for mass burial.

Farmers with land near the Treblinka camp said people were kept naked and screamed for water.

Locals were helpless but they sometimes offered the Jews water when the train stopped nearby.

Richard Glazar, a survivor, who was on the train to Treblinka, said an old man near him asked a boy outside the field where they were going. The boy moved his hand across his throat indicating that the Jews on the train were going to their death.



Children at the Treblinka Camp. Picture from film on the Treblinka camp on YouTube hosted by Erik Stakelbeck

He lived to tell the world

ABHIMANYU HAZARIKA

Trains, tightly packed with starving and helpless Jews, trundling across German-occupied Europe; gas chambers to exterminate the Jews being run systematically like factories; and some of the Jewish prisoners being recruited into 'special squads' to help with the grisly task of cremating the bodies. These events were chronicled in Shoah. The passenger lists of the ill-fated Jews are now 'artefacts' in museums.

At the extermination camps, inmates who were old and ailing would be told that they were being taken to the infirmary for treatment. But they would be led into the woods, shot dead and buried en masse in huge pits.

Filip Mueller, a Jewish Czech Holocaust survivor, was brought to Auschwitz in April 1942. He was drafted into the 'special squad' of Sonderkommandos and sent to the Birkenau camp and then back Auschwitz. Mueller, who was then 20 years-old, said he was sent into the chamber where ovens were loaded with the bodies of Jews gassed to death earlier. He was ordered to turn the bodies around in the oven till they were cremated completely.

One day, Mueller continued, the ovens overheated and the brickwork caved in. The remain-

ing bodies were loaded on to trucks and buried in deep pits in the nearby woods in Birkenau.

Tasked with undressing the corpses of women, Mueller said "I saw a woman, that is, a corpse, it was a girl, who was lying there. I looked at her, and I recognized a schoolmate from my school in Serrek...her name was Johanna Schwarz..."



Filip Mueller | SHOAH INSTITUTE

Breaking down in front of the camera, Mueller speaks of the day he walked into the gas chamber and decided to join the women waiting to die. One of the

women told him "You want to die; that makes no sense. Your dying will not keep us alive. That is no feat. You have to get out of here. You have to tell about our suffering, the injustice done to us."

Jan Karski, a courier for the Polish Government in exile, said he would sneak into the Warsaw ghetto where thousands of Polish Jews had been herded into. He said that as he walked around the ghetto, he saw people dying on the streets. There was no food and the entire place was dirty.

When Germans started to deport the ghetto inmates to Treblinka, the Jews rose in a rebellion and the deportation was stopped for a while. The rebellion was crushed brutally. Karski said his appeals to the Polish resistance and world leaders for help were ignored.

'90 per cent of Jews from Corfu died'

ANEESA PA

Moshe Mordo holds up a paper which has four pigs drawn on it. When the paper is folded the pigs come together to form an image of Adolf Hitler and Mordo manages a smile.

Mordo is the only member of his family from Corfu, an Ionian island in Greece, who survived the holocaust and lived to recall the horrors. Mordo also holds up old yellowing photographs of his father and three brothers who died in the Holocaust.

Armando Aaron, another survivor and a leader of the Jewish community in Corfu, says that all members of the Corfu Greek community were asked to report to Germans at the old Venetian Fort on a Friday morning in June 1944.

Then the 1650 Jews, including old and sick people, were separated from the Christians and others and made to wait in a church. Then, they were put on boats, called 'zatteras' made of planks and drums, and taken to Athens on the mainland. They were told that they were being taken for work in Poland but they were taken to Auschwitz-Birkenau camp by train.

"90 per cent of them died," Aaron said.

According to Aaron, most of their possessions and property were taken over by the Germans and members of the other communities on Corfu, Claude Lanzmann had interviewed the few surviving Jews of Corfu. Many of them are craftsmen or silversmiths who returned to their trade when they returned to Corfu.

Having a considerable Jewish population for more than 800 years, the relationship between Jews and Christians on the island was always bitter. In 1891, there were rumours that the Jews practised 'blood libel', murdering Christian children and using their blood in rituals. Most of the Jews migrated to Egypt in the aftermath and most left on the island were poor.

When asked what the Christians did when the Jews were herded into the fort by the Germans, Aaron said they just stopped at the corner to watch the show.

'A haircut before they die'

AATRAYEE DHAR

Kantarowski stepped forward from the crowd of Poles outside the Roman Catholic church in Chelmno where Jewish prisoners were held before being hauled off to the gas vans.

Kantarowski recalled a story from his friend near Warsaw. He said a Rabbi manhandled by the SS confessed, since the Jews had condemned Christ to death, they had to suffer now. According to Kantarowski, these were the exact words of the Rabbi, "Let blood fall on their heads and their son's heads."

Simon Srebnik, who was forced to sing for the Germans, said that after a while he didn't care much about the shipment of Jews to Chelmo as long as he

survived. As a 13-year-old Jew at the camp, he thought, "If I survive, I just want one thing: five loaves of bread...to eat. That's all."

A former SS Unterscharführer at Treblinka, Franz Suchomel said, the reports showing that 18,000 were gassed each day at Treblinka were exaggerated by the Jews. According to him, 12,000-15,000 were gassed a day at Treblinka and the entire operation from the arrival of the boxcars



Abraham Bomba

at the station to the incineration in the ovens took two hours. He sang the Treblinka camp song, "All that matters to us now is Treblinka/It's our destiny."

Abraham Bomba, a survivor from Treblinka, recalls his time at the camp, as he cuts his customer's hair in a busy shop in Israel. Soon after his arrival at the camp he was assigned with 15-16 barbers to cut the hair of women on their way to gas chambers.

Being a Czech Jew, he couldn't even tell his friends from Czechoslovakia about the macabre death awaiting them after their haircut. He breaks down as he recalls how a friend of his, another barber at Treblinka, had to cut the hair of his wife and daughter after they were undressed outside the gas chamber.

'Bodies piled up like stacks of wood'

ABHIRUPA KUNDU

SS Unterscharführer (junior squad leader) Franz Suchomel was secretly filmed for Shoah. He recalled coming to Treblinka along with seven others from Berlin and travelling through Lublin and Warsaw. The Warsaw ghetto was being emptied and trains came in an interval of two days carrying 3000 to 4000 people from there.

When the people were "unloaded" from the trains, 3000 were already dead, their wrists were slashed, and some went half-mad. These people were "stacked like wood" on one another on the ramp.

The gas chambers were overloaded and the other Jews had to wait for two days for their turn to die.

There was no place to dispose of the



Franz Suchomel | WIKIPEDIA

dead bodies and they were piled up outside the gas chambers, he said.

Sometimes the bodies would pile up over a "cesspool" of body fluids, urine and faecal matter.

Suchomel said that some Jewish women slashed their daughter's wrists and then cut their own while others poisoned themselves. Only engine exhaust was used in the gas chambers.

New gas chambers were built in 1942 and the Jews assisted in bricklaying while Ukrainian carpenters built the doors, said Suchomel. These chambers

could gas 3000 people to death in just two hours.

The Rabbi of Grabow, Jacob Schulmann, on January 19, 1942 wrote a letter to his friends in Lodz stating how he had been an eyewitness to the exterminations in Chelmno. He said the Jews were killed either by gas or were shot dead.

Non-Jewish people now occupied houses on the main street in Grabow, originally owned by the Jews.

Some women in the village said that the Jews dominated life in the area as they had the "capital". They said the Jewish women did not work like the Polish women and were more concerned about their beauty and clothes.

The men and the women of the village indicated that it did not bother them much that the Jews were gone.