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People oppose beach-link road

The Madras HC on February 21 ordered a study on extending Marina Loop Road

PHURPA LHAMO

Fishermen, environmentalists, and people residing along the Besant Nagar Beach stretch are unhappy with the Madras High Court's direction to the Government urging it to consider reconstructing a road from the Loop Road to Besant Nagar.

The order passed on February 21 by Justice Vineet Kothari and Justice R Suresh Kumar, said the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) and the State authorities should explore the possibility of reconstructing the road to create an alternative route from Santhome to reduce the traffic on the existing route.

Fearing that the project may mean their being evicted, A. Vinod, 30, who resides at the Urur Olcott Kuppam fishermen community said: "No consultation has been done. This is our home. We cannot and don't want to move somewhere else."

The 2.2 km road will pass through the fishing communities of Urur Olcott Kuppam, Nochi Nagar, Pattinapakkam, Nochikuppam, Rajaji Nagar and Mullikuppam



Reconstruction of the Broken Bridge will be part of the Loop Road to Besant Nagar road connection | PHURPA LHAMO

among others.

According to K Bharathi, president, South India Fishermen Welfare Association, there are around 50,000 families in the 14 fishermen communities, which fall along the stretch.

"Ninety per cent of these families earn their income through fishing and displacing them would take their source of income away. Even during high fishing seasons, we go in groups and staying near the seashore has helped," Bharathi said.

Bharathi said that instead of ex-

tending the Loop Road to Besant Nagar, the government could widen the Santhome High Road, which will help ease the traffic congestion.

While fishermen have been coming together to oppose the project, environmentalists and non-fishermen including residents came together to discuss the issue on February 23 as part of the Save Chennai Beaches Campaign formed in 2009 to challenge the then Coastal Elevated Expressway Project.

Although the then Chief Minis-

ter J. Jayalalitha scrapped the plan in 2011, it has been revived because of the court order.

The members of the Save Chennai Beaches Campaign said that a letter would be submitted to the High Court and a press meet would be conducted at Urur Olcott Kuppam to show the impact of the construction on fishermen and environment.

Naturalist M. Yuvan said that the road's major impact would be on the inter-tidal life along the Elliot's Beach. The stretch also had mudflats (coastal wetlands that form in intertidal areas where sediments have been deposited by tides or rivers) with varieties of clams, snails and crabs, which support the shore birds.

"There are over 191 bird species along this stretch and if this road comes through, this habitat will be lost. Even if the food is available for the birds, they will migrate due to the noise," M. Yuvan said.

The construction should also be restricted going by the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) rules, Yuvan added. The GCC is expected to complete the feasibility study by May. According to Chief Engineer

S. Rajendiran of the Buildings and Bridges Department of the GCC, the road would mean less travel and less fuel consumption.

"We know that there will be impact on the environment. That cannot be avoided," he said.

With regard to the CRZ, he said that because the Broken Bridge had been constructed prior to when the CRZ was issued in 1991, the regulations didn't apply to the project.

However, to avoid the impact on the fishermen, the GCC has a plan B for the execution of the project.

While plan A would mean the road starting from the Loop Road to Besant Nagar through the fishermen communities along the stretch, plan B would mean that the road would avoid the fishermen community at Nochi Nagar and start from the bridge near the Foreshore Estate Bus Terminus.

Rajendiran said that after the Broken Bridge connectivity, an elevated expressway could be used to avoid the fishermen community at Urur Olcott Kuppam.

The Rs 500 crores worth project is expected to be constructed under the public-private partnership (PPP) model.



The sit-in protest in Washermenpet enters its 14th day amidst allegations | SAYANTAN GUHA

Protestors deny stealing power

SAYANTAN GUHA

Anti-CAA protestors at Washermenpet have disputed press reports saying they were stealing power from junction boxes for their fans and lights at the protest site on the street.

According to the media reports

that were published with photographs, the Tamil Nadu Electric Board (TNEB) officials had "collected details about the malpractices" and found the protestors guilty.

However, the Assistant Engineer of TANGEDCO - New Washermenpet denied that any such details were collected from Chennai's Shaheen Bagh.

Basheer, one of the protestors, said "Someone had complained about us stealing electricity from the transformers and the junction boxes for the fans and lights in the protest area. But we were using electrical supply from the houses and shops nearby, only after permission."

After the complaint, TNEB officials visited the area, said Basheer. P. Rajesh, a shopkeeper in the Azeez Mohamed Ghouse Street, said, "I agreed to let them use electricity from my shop for the fans. The EB officials even came to ask about it."

The Assistant Executive Engineer (AEE) of TANGEDCO New Washermenpet said, "During the visits we found nothing against the protestors. There was a picture circulating with a fan wired to the junction box but during inspection we found that these fans were ac-

tually connected to the houses." As permission was granted by the owner of the houses the protestors are not guilty. "But we will be keeping a regular check," added the AEE.

According to Latif, President of the Wannarpet Mosque Federation, "The EB officials have verified our innocence, however, there are constant false complaints lodged against us to hinder the protests."

At the early phases of the protest, which started from February 14, there were allegations of traffic jams being caused by the protestors. But the protestors claimed to have

volunteers to facilitate free-movement of the traffic since day one. Shabnaam, one of the protestors, said "The volunteers are not designated. Whoever is free on the day can turn up and help us. Every day we have around 15-20 volunteers and they make sure that there are no traffic issues."

She insisted that the protestors abided by the allowed decibel levels while using mikes and also the time restrictions.

Talking about police vigilance in the area, Inspector General (IG) S. Murugan said "We have 300 policemen working in three shifts. They are constantly patrolling the area but we have received no complaints about traffic or noise."

The Chennai Shaheen Bagh protest, which was ignited by the alleged police brutality, was also commended for staging a civilized dissent by the IG. "As long as these protests are peaceful and don't bother the surroundings we are happy to help."

"During the visits we found nothing against the protestors. There was a picture circulating with a fan wired to the junction box but during inspection we found that these fans were actually connected to the houses."
-TANGEDCO AEE



The bus services have deteriorated over time, say commuters | SAMEER KULKARNI

MTC buses: Keep waiting

SAMEER KULKARNI

Several commuters using the Metropolitan Transport Corporation (MTC) bus services in the city have raised complaints about poor service, including low frequency of buses and discontinuation of bus services on some routes.

According to regular commuters, the quality of bus services had been deteriorating for a while. The commuters said that the bus timings were erratic and some drivers did not halt the bus at a few stops.

"The timings have become a problem. In the morning, the buses are available but they are packed, while in the evening I wait for over 30 minutes sometimes," said Anita Ratnam, a college student.

There are also routes where the service has been discontinued. For instance, 37D (K.K Nagar to Vallalar Nagar) has been scrapped, according to Senthil, a regular commuter from K.K Nagar. "The route was not very popular so they introduce a new route called 37G, inconveniencing many commuters," he said.

In another case, 11H (Iyyappanthangal to Broadway) was changed to 11G (K.K Nagar to Broadway) with a similar route now extended up to Iyyappanthangal. However, few commuters said that the frequency of 11H had gone down and the bus timings were erratic.

Due to untimely bus services, share autos and vans have come to the rescue of waiting commuters. These share services, which are against the rules, operate more frequently and in some cases, are cheaper than the MTC buses.

Even on popular routes where there is no shortage of buses the poor frequency continues to be the problem. For instance, from Shastri Bhavan in Nungabakkam to DMS on Anna Salai there are several bus options. However, lack of

buses during the afternoons has led people to be dependent on the share autos and vans.

"I won't reach anywhere if I start relying on these buses. These share autos run frequently and they charge the same," said Rajesh, who often travels by share auto.

While the share auto services come handy when the buses do not arrive on time, the pass-holders have a tough time making the choice.

Every-day commuters like students and office-goers have opted for monthly and yearly passes; they have to continue to wait for the buses, even if they arrive late.

In case of longer routes, commuters have to completely rely on buses, as other modes of transport, like cabs, can be expensive.

For instance, 11B, Broadway to K.K Nagar (Ashok Pillar - Kodabakkam Power House - Gemini Flyover) through Secretariat has only two trips per day, one in the morning and the other at dusk.

According to commuters, the bus is completely packed during both trips. They said that if the route is popular then more buses should be made available. "There are only two trips because it is specially for the Secretariat staff. The bus is crowded only till Ashok Pillar. After that point there are lot of buses, like 17D and 11G," said Nedunsezhian, Deputy Manager of Operations (Commercial) at MTC.

He denied that the bus routes had been discontinued and said there have been only minor changes. Regarding shortage of 11G buses, he said, there are many buses and recently a minor diversion was created.

"The bus now goes via Central instead of Secretariat because of the one-way traffic near Reserve Bank of India caused by the subway construction. More commuters are benefited on this route," he added.

4 student suicides in a year

SHIVANAND S

A 19-year-old B.Tech student was found hanging in her hostel room at the SRM Institute of Science and Technology, Kattankulathur, near Chennai on February 22. The reason for her suicide is not known. A case has been registered at the Maraimalai Nagar police station.

This is the fourth suicide in the Kattankulathur campus in one year, going by media reports. The CBCID (Crime Branch-Crime Investigation Department) has been investigating these suicides at the hostel on the campus.

Ayushi Mishra, a fellow hostel resident said, "On Saturday morning the girl's roommates found her hanging in her room on the eighth floor of the hostel building. That floor is currently empty."

Another hosteler said "I have heard that the girl has attempted suicide several times in the past. She was once rushed to the hospital for cutting her wrist."

The university has not given any official statement regarding the suicides till now. There are many rumours circulating among the students at the university regarding these suicide incidents.

Lovdeep Singh, an MBA student of the university said "The students are also not clear about the reason behind these suicides."

Along with several rumours such as relationship failures and family problems, academic pressure has also been considered as a reason behind such incidents.

Asked about that, an engineering professor said, "Most certainly, academic pressure is not the reason behind these suicides. These students have their personal problems such as romantic affairs and family situations that lead to mental pressure."

"The professors, here, have been open to any suggestion from the students and we give several warnings before we take any serious action against the students for failing exams or missing deadline on project submission," he added.

He also said, "This university admits thousands of students every year and we have never received any complaints of students being put under pressure for academic performance."

Another professor said, "Few students get addicted to substance abuse and bad habits that might also be the reason for such tragic incidences."

Sayeesha Agarwal, an MSc student said that "We have several inspections in our hostel and if any student had been caught for possessing any illegal substance or alcohol, their parents are informed and the management takes immediate action. In some cases, they are left with warnings."

The college has hosted few 'anti-suicide' camps earlier to provide counselling and awareness to the students. R. Shiva Virman, an M.A. Mass Communication student who conducted the last year's camp, 'Jeevan' said "Our department has hosted this camp for two consecutive years, 2018 and 2019. We bring in renowned psychologists to provide counselling for the students."

These camps seem to have been the only initiative to prevent suicides. Many students complained that the university has not taken any steps to ensure the safety of the students.

Some of the CCTV cameras on the campus have been non-functional for months. No steps were taken even after receiving several complaints from the student.

Rajesh Mishra, father of a hostel resident said, "Most of the students residing at the hostel are from other states. We left our wards here assuming that it won't be safe for them outside but such incidents put their safety in question. The management should take steps to protect the students. These incidents might have a mental impact on other students. This is the fourth case of suicide and management is yet to take action."

Modern cremation methods not welcome

RITUPARA PALIT

People will switch over completely to modern methods of cremation only if the Government takes a policy decision to stop conventional cremation, said Dr. M.D Jagadeesan, City Health Officer at the Greater Chennai Corporation.

Dr. Jagadeesan said that people had been receptive to the Greater Chennai Corporation's (GCC) drive to convert conventional crematorium sheds to modern centres with gas or electric furnaces. But some insisted on cremating their relatives the traditional way.

"If somebody insists that we allow them to practice conventional cremation, we redirect them to the sites designated for handling these practices," he added.

Sangeetha Rajendran, Assistant Zonal Health Officer said that of the 199 Corporation and private-run burial grounds in the city with cremation sheds, 34 were gasifier-based and 6 are electric crematoria. All the services at government-run sheds were provided free of charge,



The GCC requests people to use the new Free Gasifier set up at the crematorium at Haridhandra Road, in Injambakkam | RITUPARNA PALIT

irrespective of the method used.

"Around 100 conventional crematorium sheds are owned by the Corporation, most of which are located in the extended city. We are demolishing them or converting them," said Dr. Jagadeesan.

One such is the Uthandi crematorium in Sholinganallur and it is has been proposed that it be shut down because of the pollution caused by conventional methods used

there.

Talking of an alternative, D Sukumar, Zonal Officer (Zone 15), said, "We have put up a board at the site notifying people about the shutdown and informing them that the gasifier-based crematorium at Injambakkam is instead available for use."

The crematorium in Injambakkam is 6.2 km away from the one in Uthandi.

Explaining the local residents' dependence on the Uthandi crematorium, Balaji, a resident of Uthandi said, "The shed has been functional for the last 60 years. People have started complaining about pollution only recently."

Sukumar said that the locals were resentful about this move by the GCC, and a public meeting with the locals, tehsildar, land department officials and police was

scheduled next month. "Only if we are able to convince the locals to use the modernized crematorium at Injambakkam, the proposal to shut down this conventional shed will go ahead."

Citing the cost-efficiency and environment friendliness of electrical and gasifier crematoriums, Sukumar said, "We are planning to propose one crematorium for each of the 9 divisions in Zone 15."

M D Dhanasekar, officer-in-charge of the Besant Nagar Isha crematorium, said, "For lack of manpower and resources to maintain the modernized crematoria, the Corporation has outsourced maintenance activities to NGOs. The Besant Nagar, Mylapore and Nesa-pakkam crematoria were handed over to Isha Foundation in 2018."

Comparing traditional to modern methods, Dhanasekar said, "While it takes 500-600 kg wood to burn a body on a funeral pyre, 1 LPG cylinder is sufficient to burn two bodies. Also, the entire process takes a minimum of 6 hours on a wooden pyre as against 1 hour in a gasifier."

The traditional methods were stopped 10 years back at Besant Nagar. It, being a VIP area, complaints about pollution got escalated pretty quickly to the Pollution Control Board and funeral pyres were stopped thereafter. Even the drum beating during funeral processions had now been restricted from 4 a.m. to 5 p.m., added Dhanasekar.

Talking of the criteria for allowing a conventional shed, Dr. Jagadeesan said, "The permission to put up funeral pyres is given only to sheds with large spaces, like the 12-acre Mylapore crematorium." Even if most crematoria in the core city have been modernized, people keep coming to us requesting for traditional cremation, which is why we might have to retain 1-2 conventional sheds, even if we demolish the others, he added.

While Sukumar said that uneducated people were reluctant to give up conventional methods, Dr. Jagadeesan believed it was their religious preferences that urged people to do so.

'Cauvery Delta Bill will not help farmers'

SAMEER KULKARNI

Experts have raised concerns over the immediate, as well as long-term, impact of the new Tamil Nadu Protected Agricultural Zone Development Bill, 2020 which seeks to protect the Cauvery basin by converting the land into Special Agricultural Zones.

The Bill is aimed at preventing the mushrooming of new projects for extracting natural resources like oil and gas in five districts in the Cauvery basin—Thanjavur, Tiruvannur, Nagapattinam, Cuddalore and Pudukkottai.

However, the existing oil wells remain unaffected. The legislation comes as a relief to the farmers in the area, who have been protesting against the extractions for years.

However, as far the prevention of the new projects is concerned, there are identifiable loopholes.

Last month, the Centre announced that these projects, like oil explorations, do not require public hearings or a green clearance, (which is an environmental clearance for an industrial project).

"We do not know whether the Centre's stance will make the Bill nil and void; the only power the State has is the green clearance," said Dr. Jayaranjan, an economist. "If the Centre can give these



Tamil Nadu Protected Agricultural Zone Development Bill seeks to protect fields like these | WIKIMEDIA

kind of exceptions, there is no guarantee that it won't give clearance for the future projects," he said. Considering the public protests against the oil exploration, the Centre's position on the issue was "atrocious," he added.

The Bill came late, according to experts; but they are optimistic as, from now on, a few zones can be protected from further exploitation.

Dr. Zareena Begum, a professor at the Madras School of Economics and an expert in Environmental Economics, said that it was a pro-

misgiving move. She recalled the case of Neyveli lignite projects and how the extraction of lignite, which is the "younger version" of coal, led to disastrous effects on the agricultural ecosystem.

"In some lands of the region, before the Neyveli lignite extractions began, export crops like jackfruit and cashew were harvested. Due to lack of a protective cap, these crops were sidelined for the lignite extraction. This was at the time when the two commercial crops were get-

ting a GI tag," said Dr. Begum.

The farmers of Neyveli, it turns out, were better off than other farmers in the region.

According to the agricultural census, she said, the farmers had other sources of income and fell under higher bracket of income thus were willing to give away farming and the land, too. "The victim, however, was the land," she added.

Now, with the introduction of the new law, the agricultural farmlands in the region are protected, however, the Bill forecloses the options for farmers from using the land for new industrial projects that may come in the near future.

"The government is imprisoning the farmers in the name of farming," said Jayaranjan.

If farming continues to experience a negative trend in terms of trade and if the farmers continue to lose money, there is literally no escape route for them.

"It is not only that farmers need policies during agricultural distress but a proactive policy which would prevent them from falling into distress at the first place," he said.

The farmers, willy-nilly, are stuck with their lands. If the coming generation wants to step out of agriculture to pursue other opportunities, they cannot. The land has

to be passed on to a cultivator only. The Bill, in some way, coerces farmers into continuing agriculture, according to Jayaranjan.

"There is no capital investment in agricultural sector by the government," said Jayaranjan.

"They have closed whatever little options the farmers had for an exit. Now the farmers are trapped—all in the name of their own welfare," he added.

In cases of farmers who own lands that are economically unproductive, they need more inputs and if not provided, they might have to give away the land which is not permitted now. "The government cannot force a livelihood on somebody," said Dr. Begum.

The economy of the region will be impacted by the new law. According to a rural economy expert, real estate, even in the interior region of Tamil Nadu, will take a hit as the land cannot be given away for commercial purpose.

However, in the Cauvery basin, only 30 per cent of the farmers are landowners.

"The grasslands cannot even be converted into a park now, as they might damage the land later. Urbanization, without a doubt, has helped a lot of farmers get out of the agrarian crisis," said another expert.



P. Chidambaram at the seminar on CAA | SAYANTAN GUHA

'A fight to save democracy'

SAYANTAN GUHA

Former Union Finance Minister P. Chidambaram has asserted that the anti-CAA (Citizenship Amendment Act) protests were not part of a Muslim versus Hindu rhetoric but it is the fight of Indian citizens who want to protect their nation's democracy. Speaking at a seminar on CAA called "Save Constitution, Save Democracy" conducted by the Forum for Protection of Constitution at Madras Kerala Samajam here on February 23, Chidambaram questioned the claims of the BJP government that the Act, which was passed on December 11, wouldn't affect the Indian citizens.

"CAA clearly states that it applies to people who came to India after December 31, 2014. So the claim of BJP leaders that it wouldn't affect people of India is a lie. This is not a mistake, it is a lie," he reiterated. "And if no one is going to get affected, why do you need a new law?"

The religious divisions that are implied by the CAA have made many countries question the existence of such a law, he added. It had tarred the image and reputation of India as a secular nation.

The European Parliament, the United Nations Human Rights Council and a United Nations panel on religious freedom have asked India to give up the contentious law.

Talking about Assam's NRC (National Register of Citizens), Chidambaram called it a "complete failure".

"Nineteen lakh people were declared foreigners, of which 12 lakh were Hindus and 7 lakh were Muslims. Where will you evict them?" he asked. He alleged that the CAA was a move to retain the 12 lakh Hindus and a step towards the long-drawn dream of a "Hindu Rashtra" of the BJP and RSS.

Chidambaram argued that in no other country had illegal migrants been mass evicted. "There are countries which have stopped illegal immigration but no country would evict 19 lakh people."

Mocking the US-India meet, Chidambaram asked Prime Minis-

ter Narendra Modi to consult US President Donald Trump about the implications of such a law.

"Our party (Indian National Congress) had cautioned as early as when the idea of a survey was presented that it would lead to social discord," he said.

Chidambaram also questioned the Government's decision to corner the three Muslim countries in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. "Why have they excluded China, Myanmar or Sri Lanka?"

Chidambaram's final solution to counter the current situation of social discomfort surrounding the CAA was to scrap both NPR and CAA and bury the idea of a nationwide NRC.

G. Selva, CPI (M) Secretary, said the failure of the BJP in Delhi elections 2020 were clear signs of a loss of political hold. "Most people who supported the BJP and Modi have turned against them because of the CAA and all the protests surrounding it."

Condemning the State Government for not supporting the peaceful protests unlike the governments in Kerala and Andhra Pradesh, Selva added, "Protests are done to protect democracy."

Selva called out on the Government's approach to certify one's motherland on the basis of their religion. He also asked the protestors to consider the situations in Assam and be aware of the implications of the NRC there. Their fight for identity had very often been neglected by the national media.

Rashmitha R. Chandran, Advocate of the Supreme Court, said she hoped the Supreme Court would take a stand against this law and promised to fight until the Act is repealed.

Rashmitha, in 2018, was, reportedly, abused by a right-wing ally on live television. She spoke about the several incidents of cyber-bullying she has faced for her stand against the CAA and asked the audience to not pay heed to such occurrences.

Finally, she asked the opposition parties to unite and add to the individual voices of dissent, which according to her has been largely lacking in the protests.



Painted compound walls of Dr Ambedkar Arts College | SASHWATA SAHA

Students clash with party workers

SASHWATA SAHA

The students of Dr. Ambedkar Government Arts College in Vyasarpadi, here, on Monday, clashed with members of the local AIADMK unit over the party workers' attempt to paint images of political leaders on the college's compound wall.

For years, the college's western wall and the path running alongside it have been neglected. Students said that pedestrians often urinated on the wall while the local residents dumped garbage on the path. In an effort to end this, about two weeks ago, the students from the Department of Social Work had cleared the garbage and whitewashed the walls. It took them two days to complete the clean up.

Sandhya G, a final year postgraduate student from the Department of Social Work, said "We couldn't bear to see the filth just outside the campus. The smell coming from there was horrible. Who wants to see strangers openly urinating on their campus wall?"

However, soon after this, the empty stretch of wall attracted the attention of the local functionaries of the ruling party who wanted to draw a mural of former Chief Minister, late J. Jayalalitha on the wall in honour of her 74th birth anniversary. On the evening of February 18, some party members started drawing a mural of Jayalalitha along with images of the Chief Minister Edappadi K. Palaniswami and his deputy, O. Panneerselvam.

"Our college has no intention of being used for any political purpose and hence, we whitewashed the walls, again, the very next day," said George K, a third year Business Administration student. "That Thursday (February 20), some workers came and told us that they had drawn a line on the wall and will draw their pictures on that patch."

Professor K. Shyamala, Head of the Department of Social Work, said, "I and some other faculty members went to see the party workers to ask them to leave the wall alone. The students had worked really hard to do something that the Corporation had ignored for years. Now, to paint political messages on these walls – it is an insult to the kids' efforts."

However, the negotiation did not work out and over the next few days, the students painted social welfare messages and art over the political murals.

"Goons have been threatening us, since then," said Jaikerthi C., a second year Visual Communications student.

On Monday, February 24, a fight broke out between a group of students and a few party workers each party alleging that the other started the fight. However, the situation was defused quickly before it could get out of control. Some sustained minor injuries.

A. Geetha, College principal, said, "The administration has been supportive of the students in their fight to keep the wall free but the students who were part of the altercation would face disciplinary action."

AIADMK north Chennai district secretary R. S. Rajesh said that the matter had been brought up to him before and that he had previously warned his party workers to stay away from the campus.

"The wall is the college's property and we have no right to draw on them. I will personally take strict action against the workers who had instigated the fight," he said.

Cement units still hit by slowdown

RIZVI SAIF

Poor demand in the market is still plaguing the cement industry in Tamil Nadu, according to dealers and manufacturers.

"Supply is more than the demand. Because of recession and economic slowdown, the demand has gone down," said Chandrashekar, manager of the cement dealer, P. Selvaraj and Co.

He said that more than one lakh houses were ready for occupation but as the demand was not increasing, further projects were stopped and construction work was taken up only according to the requirements of the customers.

"The economy should grow by at least 7 to 8 per cent for the conditions to improve. The central government should bring in schemes to increase the purchasing power of individuals," he said.

According to a press release by the India Cements Limited (ICL), the southern part of India had "de-grown" by more than 10 per cent during the second quarter of the current fiscal year that ended in November, 2019. Although Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are the two states mentioned by the ICL, the situation is not very different in Tamil Nadu.

The current price of one bag of cement is around Rs

360 (the prices may vary according to brands). In 2014, there was a sudden hike in price from Rs 260 per bag to Rs 320. According to reports, builders had threatened to stop construction work if the rates were not brought down. But still, the price has ranged from Rs 320 to over Rs 400 per bag.

Krishna Venkatesh, Manager of SVM Construction Company said, "There is very less money flow and the business is very dim. Four to five years back our markets were at least 50 per cent better."

He added that companies which wished to construct buildings on low budget use poor quality cement that they get for a lower price. "They are forced to compromise on quality," he said adding that unemployment in the IT sector has directly affected the construction industry.

The GST rate on cement being 28 per cent has much to do with the deteriorating situation of the industry. Though the implementation was meant to push the cement industry up the economic ladder, the sudden hike in price adversely affected it. And this in turn affected the cost of infrastructure and housing which is highly dependent on cement.

In an interview with *The Economic Times* last year, India Cements Chairman N.



A factory of the RAMCO Cements Limited in Tamil Nadu | RAMCO WEBSITE

The economy should grow up by at least 7 to 8 per cent for the conditions to improve.

- P. SELVARAJ AND CO., MANAGER

Srinivasan, said that he did not expect any cut in GST rate for cement because it was a lot of money that the government would have to give up. He said, "In Chennai, four years ago the price was Rs 415 a bag now it is only Rs 405 a bag." He was optimistic that the demand would pick up as the government would need cement for various infrastructure projects.

Local outlets on the other

hand are doing comparatively better. Aadhikesavan, owner of a hardware shop in Besant Nagar that stocks Ramco cements, sells at least 360 bags a week. "We don't give bulk orders. Since there are slums and fishermen colonies nearby, our business has remained steady over the years."

He gets 460 bags of cement from Ramco every week and sells them at Rs 360 a bag.

Green volunteers encourage sustainable methods

RITUPARNA PALIT

Everyone should reduce environmental pollution by cutting down their carbon footprint to the minimum possible, said Dr. Alby John Varghese, Regional Deputy Commissioner (South), Greater Chennai Corporation, here on February 22.

Dr. John was speaking in a panel discussion on Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules 2016 at the Green Chennai 2020 conference organized by Namma Ooru Foundation, a non-governmental organization that works for environmental betterment of society with its projects in waste management, community building and conserving water bodies.

W.S. Habib, President, Credai (Chennai Chapter), Lavanya Rajamani of Asvini Amaris Residents/Owners Community, Ravi, President, Chennai Hotel Association and K. Tirupathi, Project Head for Innovative Hotel Waste Recycling Project were the other panellists for the discussion. P. Natarajan, CEO, Namma Ooru moderated the discussion.

The Central Government laid out SWM Rules in 2016, that replaced the Municipal Solid Wastes (Management and Handling) Rules, 2000. They required waste generators to segregate waste at source into three streams - Biodegradables, Dry (Plastic, Paper, metal, Wood, etc.) and Domestic Hazardous Waste (diapers, napkins, mosquito repellents and cleaning agents) before handing it over to the collector.



Residents of Besant Nagar through the exhibition-cum-sale of sustainable products hosted by Green Chennai 2020 | RITUPARNA PALIT

Habib said that the building codes for SWM 2016 were notified to all the 160 construction projects under Credai, but it required better implementation and GCC's help was needed to conduct training workshops for them.

Asked about the challenges faced by the Greater Chennai Corporation in handling solid waste, Dr. John said, "Littering and unsegregated waste are the major concerns. We have identified subject matter experts who help the bulk waste generators like builders, hotels, super-

markets, vegetable markets and slaughter houses in dealing with their waste. The idea is 'my waste, my responsibility'."

Tirupathi asked stakeholders to support his project's proposal to collect bulk waste from hotels and supply it to farmers across Tamil Nadu after converting it into manure.

The Green Chennai 2020 also hosted talks and debates on waste disposal. The event was chaired by Kamakshi Subramanian, a 92-year-old activist who works to address civic issues in

Besant Nagar.

The discussion on 'Importance of Wetlands' by speakers Dr. D. Narasimhan, Professor at Madras Christian College and Vidya Shankar, chairperson of Relief Foundation and founding member of Namma Ooru dealt with educating the audience about the environmental degradation of Pallikarnai marshland caused by the continual dumping of waste in the Perungudi dumpsite. The speakers also talked about the encroachments eating up the marshland.

"We have 4 'R's in this age, and not three—refuse, reduce, reuse, recycle. People must voluntarily call out the stakeholders and refrain from buying properties built on landfills," said Shankar.

The three workshops on home composting, sustainable menstruation, and bio-enzyme making, witnessed huge participation from homemakers and students.

Talking of the landfills loaded with sanitary waste, Preeti, a volunteer from Namma Ooru, said there were 555 million menstruating women in India who generated 5,000 crore tonnes of sanitary waste a year. She suggested that women switch over to sustainable menstruation practices like cotton pads and menstrual cups. These were both cost-effective and reusable.

Ranging from reusable cloth diapers to recycled notebooks, there was an all-day sale of sustainable products by a number of retailers like Tula India, Maarjana, Organic Farmers' Market, Sri Arunodayam and Reboot.

Polluted metro water

SASHWATA SAHA

Many residents of Kolathur and Villivakkam have complained that the water supplied by the Chennai Metro Water Corporation via their Depot No. 65 on Kalidass Street in Kolathur is contaminated, that it has a noxious smell and that it tastes strange.

RD Jayakumar, a banker residing on Thazhankinaru Street in Villivakkam, whose house is supplied by Depot No. 65 said, "This problem started out late last year – October end or early November. The water smelt funny and it tasted different. My daughter got sick soon thereafter and the doctor said that it was from drinking polluted water."

Jayakumar gets his water every two days from the Metro Water trucks. His household is careful with how they treat it. They boil the water before drinking because Jayakumar says they have lost faith in electronic water purifiers ever since his daughter got sick.

Earlier this year on January 17, Jayakumar had filed a complaint to Metro Water with the registration number, 200117060010. According to him, the organisation's response was cold. The complaint was closed earlier this month on February 8 without providing any tangible solution.

Jayakumar is not the only one facing issues with the water. Karthik R, an IT engineer living in Nakeeran Street, Kolathur which also falls under Depot No. 65's purview said, "I used to live in Anna Nagar and the first thing that struck me



A truck leaves to supply water from Chennai Metro Water Depot No. 65 on Kalidass Street in Kolathur | SASHWATA SAHA

about the place is that the tank water smelt foul. It becomes very apparent when you're washing dishes or taking a bath."

Karthik said that especially during bathing, the smell is at its worst. He added that he ended up with a bad stomach, soon after he shifted, blaming it on the water. It has been months since he came here but the water situation has not changed and therefore, he has decided to file a complaint to the water supplier.

Dr. G Anbarasan, a physician with an office on Jeeva Street, Kolathur said, "I have received some

patients suffering from dysentery and diarrhea, over the past few months.

Only last week, there were three of them. These are two of the most common diseases that are caused by drinking contaminated water. I have asked my local patients to boil the water before drinking. Electronic purifiers and Aquaguard go a long way but I still insist on water being boiling."

Chennai Metro Water Deputy Public Relations Manager and Grievance Redressal and Facilitation Officer, M Srinivasan said, "We have received the complaint in

question along with a few others expressing similar concerns. Our Quality Assurance (QA) people have looked into the issue, extensively, for nearly three weeks. The Executive Engineer, QA did not find anything wrong with the water. There were no traces of fluoride, lead or any bacteria in the water."

He attributed the strange taste to the chlorine and the smell to the residents' unclean tanks before adding that that Metro Water had reduced the use of chlorine in the water. "Hence, the complaints were closed, a couple of weeks ago," Srinivasan concluded.

MRTS cleaners complain of poor working conditions

PRIYADA K S

The contract of cleaning workers at the MRTS stations in Chennai was over by February and the new tender has not been issued yet. This has led to difficulty in getting workers for the job, according to an MRTS official.

Ravi Kumar, an MRTS official, said that some cleaning workers were unavailable as the contract was over by February and that it had become difficult to find people for taking up cleaning works.

The workers are facing problems as the wages are low and they work in unsafe conditions.

Savithri Amma, a cleaning worker, said that she used to get Rs 6000 every month and now that the contract is over, she is working on a temporary basis.

S Andal who is working at the Thiruvannamur station said that they get Rs 170 to Rs 200 per day. They have to work every day without any off day and holidays.

"Even on festivals like Diwali, Eid or Christmas we have to take leave and so we lose that day's salary," she said.

Molin, another worker who cleans the tracks said that she injured her leg while trying to get back on the platform as a train was approaching. She had to mortgage gold for the treatment and no health insurance or money of any sort was provided by the railways for the treatment. "My husband is bedridden and my treatment along with it cost a lot of money," she said.

There are no railway officials to give signals when a train arrives while they are working on the track. They are provided blue coats and they wear it while working on the track so that the loco pilot can see them, she said.

Chief Public Relations Officer of Southern Railways B Guganesan said that contracts were given for three years and it got over by February. "The cleaning workers are provided ESI (Employees' State Insurance) and PF (Provident Fund), no other benefit is given to the workers," he said. About the problems the



MRTS workers resting after a day's work at Thiruvannamur station | RITUPARNA PALIT

workers face while cleaning the tracks, he said that contractors take the responsibility for their protection. "Wages for 30 days are paid to the contractors and the off days and holidays are decided by them," he added.

The MRTS stations are supposed to be cleaned twice a day and as the contract is over now workers are unavailable in some stations. Workers come on shifts from 7 am to 12 noon and 2 pm to 7 pm.

Karima, a worker complained about security issues as there were no proper lights in many parts of the station.

The Sub-Inspector of police at the Thiruvannamur Railway Police Station S. Rajamani said that only one case had been filed in the station this year.

The Southern Railways recently posted RPF officers and former service men to solve the security issues in the stations.



Rusted swings with dried leaves and cobwebs at a Corporation park in Adyar | RIZVI SAIF

Corporation parks remain a mess

RIZVI SAIF

Rusted swings. Cobweb filled slides. Broken beer bottles. Dry leaves, rocks and garbage heap. This is the condition of the corporation park at Venkitarathinam Nagar in Adyar.

"How can you call that a park? It's an abandoned area," said a man who was passing by.

The Greater Chennai Corporation as part of the green revolution had set up 525 parks including major

ones like Anna Park and Indra Nagar Park and a small park each in different areas of a zone.

The corporation park at GOCHS colony in Besant Nagar (division 176) is empty in the evening. Priyanka Kottiyal, a resident who lives just beside the park takes her fifth standard child to the park in Kalakshetra colony, which is a few kilometres away.

"The rides at the Besant Nagar

park are not maintained properly and it's unsafe for kids. Parks are supposed to have sand and not hard cement floors," she said.

Just outside the park, the garbage bin is placed. Broken toilets and pieces of tiles were heaped up beside it.

The condition of the corporation park in Anna Colony, Besant Nagar, is also similar.

The park remains without security and the residents' association takes care of the maintenance. Anuradha Sreekanth, a resident, said,

"Very few children come to play because of overgrown bushes and scattered plastic waste."

Tamilanbu, assistant engineer of the parks department at the GCC said, "Maintenance of most of the major parks is taken care of by private agencies whereas cleaning staff and security for the small parks are arranged by the corporation." The parks have thus gone out of use and remain rarely used.

'Frequent digging' of roads irks traders

RAHUL MANOJ

Frequent digging of roads in Adambakkam for laying stormwater drains, sewerage networks and electricity lines has drawn heavy criticism from traders and commuters.

"The Brindavan Nagar Main road has been dug for the second time in one and a half years for laying stormwater drains," said Ramanujam, owner of Kamala Cellphones.

He said that the digging was suddenly carried out at 11 p.m. on Wednesday without any prior notice. A complaint to the Brindavan Nagar Vyabarigal Sangam did not yield any response, he added.

Ramanujam also said that when the digging work was carried out, his shop's flooring was damaged by the bulldozer.

Venkatesh Subramanian, a customer said "It is not safe to walk on the temporary plank laid to enter the shop."

He also added that after completion of the work, the roads are improperly fixed with slabs or

filled with mud and the damaged portion is not relaid.

Nandakumar, a contractor employed by the Greater Chennai Corporation (GCC) for the project said that the work would get over in a week.

He also said that digging has been done only in front of some shops which do not have proper sewage connections.

Chaos prevails on the Lake View road that has been dug by the Tamil Nadu Electricity Board (TNEB) for laying new electricity lines.

"Due to the digging of roads, the old telephone lines have been damaged in the process," said Suresh, an employee of Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL).

He added that a lot of complaints were being received from customers that their telephones were not working.

Devanayagam, a coconut seller said that his business had been affected as he was forced to shift his shop to the Karuneeagar Street, around 600m away from the Lake View Road.

Sundaresan, a commuter said "There is a lot of traffic congestion



TNEB workers laying down underground electric cables at the Lake View Road, Adambakkam | RAHUL MANOJ

in the evening, cars are diverted and have to take a longer route."

He also added that pedestrians

who used the road regularly were put to a lot of risk.

However, Elango, a TNEB

employee said "The new infrastructure will improve the power situation and would lead to less power cuts ahead of the summer season."

He also said that 110kv and 230kv underground cables were laid as the overhead cables would be removed. The lines would be decongested by transferring connections from the smaller Guindy substation to the bigger Alandur substation and then extended to Phoenix Mall, Velachery.

Project supervisor Vijay said, "The work was started a week ago and is expected to be completed in another 10 days."

He added that the overhead cables were exposed to wind and affected by movement of huge vehicles. So, the laying of underground cables would ensure safety before the monsoon season.

V.Rama Rao, a social activist said, "Government agencies such as the GCC and TNEB must ensure that roads are restored to its original state once the repair works are completed and do not pose a danger to the public."

TASMAC outlets a 'nuisance' in Adambakkam

RAHUL MANOJ

Four TASMAC outlets in Adambakkam continue to be a source of nuisance to residents, shopkeepers as well as pedestrians with drunken men getting into fights and parking their vehicles all over the place.

"Politicians are partners in the New Phoenix Bar, New Colony Main Road, Adambakkam and they will never remove it," said Gowri (40), a housewife.

Gowri, a resident of New Colony, Adambakkam participated in a protest along with fellow residents against the opening of the outlet two years ago.

"I was detained for a few hours in a marriage hall for protesting without permission and let off later," she added.

She said that the case went on for two to three hearings in the Alandur Magistrate's court and was dropped in favour of the bar owners.

Gowri also added that even if the shop was closed during public holidays, the tippers enter the lane of their house and hurled abuses.

Recently, "batteries from the bikes parked near the shop were stolen and I suspect tippers to be behind it," said Bharat Ravichandran, Gowri's son.

Further pointing to bikes parked around a water tank situated opposite to a TASMAC outlet, he said that if the bikes were not removed the water tanker would move on and the houses would go without water supply.

Allwin Mathews, a commuter, said "The tippers engage in a verbal duel and park their



Bikes parked recklessly in front of a water tank opposite a TASMAC (right) and alcohol bottles thrown in front of a shop (left) | RAHUL MANOJ

vehicles in a haphazard manner and it is difficult to drive in this road after 8 p.m."

Suresh Kumar, sales manager at the New Phoenix Bar said "Five security guards are employed during the working hours to prevent any ruckus inside the shop."

Kumar added that barricades had been erected to protect the households next to the TASMAC shop.

Vicky, owner of the bar said "14 security cameras have been installed to prevent any sort of trouble."

A visit to another TASMAC outlet on West Karikalan Street, Adambakkam is more disturbing.

There are no security guards outside the shop. Sandwiched between business firms, the shop is thronged by tippers.

D.Selvaraj, owner of Kurinji Broiler said, "Though the government order says TASMAC outlets must operate only from 12 noon to 10 pm, it is a 24/7 shop here. Selvaraj alleged that the police and the TASMAC officials were hand-in glove with each other.

Agreeing with this, Muniraj, Manager of Limra Mobiles said, "Once some tippers broke beer bottles in front of my shop in an inebriated state and I had to close my shop early. In spite of my complaint to the police, no action was taken."

"I also had to remove the broken bottle pieces", he added.

Wine shop number 4079 on Vellalar Street, Adambakkam situated next to the St Thomas Mount Railway station is also a problem.

"I usually ask my father to pick me up from the station once I return after 9 p.m., as it is highly unsafe to travel alone", said Janaki Srinivasan (20), a college student.

S.Prabhu, constable, Adambakkam- S8 police station said "We receive around 7-8 complaints related to TASMAC every month and the nuisance caused by the tippers is higher during the weekends."

The police are always on rounds near TASMAC outlets, he added. "Sometimes the tippers scream loudly and the residents call us as if it is a big emergency", said Prabhu.

"Whenever the tippers cause disturbance to the public, we apprehend and book them under Section 268 (Public Nuisance) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC)," he added.

G.Parthasarathy, secretary of Federation of Adambakkam Welfare Associations (FAWA) said, "The mushrooming of TASMAC outlets in and around Adambakkam is a cause of concern. We have made multiple representations to the authorities to close the outlets in our area, but to no avail," he said.

Kandasamy, Secretary of Gandhiya Makkal Iyakkam that campaigns for total prohibition of TASMAC in the state, said, "The number of TASMAC outlets in the city have increased. The government claims that it will implement prohibition in phases but it seems that it will never happen."

He added that the safety of women could not be compromised at any cost.

Fighting online child abuse

PHURPA LHAMO

For every 100 cases of child sexual abuse brought to Tuliir—a non-profit organisation, which works to prevent child sexual abuse in Chennai—only three would be considered for being reported it to the police.

This was among the many concerns shared at the panel discussion held in collaboration with UNICEF on February 22 on addressing online child sexual abuse and exploitation material (CSAM) at Asian College of Journalism (ACJ) in Chennai.

According to the founder of Tuliir, Vidya Reddy, in addition to the low rate of police complaints, only about 12 percent of children who experienced sexual abuse choose to disclose the abuse.

“Media is one biggest reasons people are not reporting to the cops. They are so petrified that their lives are going to be out, which is what happens to them,” Vidya Reddy said.

With Vidya Reddy, H.Jayalakshmi, Deputy Commissioner, Crimes Against Women and Children, Priyanka Thirumurthy, Tamil Nadu Bureau Chief with The News Minute and Siddharth Pillai, director of the Aarambh India Initiative were also part of the panel.

The panelists said stigmatisation in society, lack of parental support, lack of awareness among the children on CSAM and difficulty in locating offenders who view child sexual abuse and pornographic content were some of the major issues faced by NGOs and police in addressing online CSAM.

Siddharth Pillai said that the long process of the legal system in delivering justice was also a major reason



(From left to right) Speakers Priyanka Thirumurthy, H Jayalakshmi, Vidya Reddy, Siddharth Pillai | PHURPA LHAMO

son of concern. “One of the victims is now 21 years and the incident happened when he was 15 years. His life has to go on, right?” Siddharth Pillai said.

Today, the Chennai Police have started to arrest online CSAM viewers depending upon their history of viewing the content and their intentions by getting the IP addresses from Interpol Delhi and checking their activity online.

Deputy Commissioner H.Jayalakshmi said that the police received about 600 IP addresses from the Interpol. “But most of them are outside Chennai and are very difficult to track. We can say that about 20 per cent of the offenders have been arrested until today,” H.Jayalakshmi said.

On questions regarding the possibility of arresting all the content viewers, which would result in thousands, H.Jayalakshmi said that people weren’t arrested just because a person viewed an online CSAM.

Siddharth Pillai said that the long process of the legal system in delivering justice was also a major reason

“There was a person who viewed the content but didn’t share and didn’t have other interactions. We didn’t arrest him,” H.Jayalakshmi said.

While the police are engaged in identifying the offenders, concerns regarding self-generation of CSAM contents were also raised.

Siddharth Pillai said that today sexting and sending photos of nude people had become part of courtship ritual and children were at higher risk due to it.

“If I want the child’s future to be safe, I have to tell them this information, but there are cultural mindsets, which makes it difficult to put it in front of the children whereas it is very much needed,” Siddharth Pillai said.

Pointing out that sensitisation of cases of child sexual abuse by the media was a major challenge in helping the family and the child, the panel said that sensitive reporting in terms of protection of the child’s identity was must.

More funds needed for child welfare

SANCHARI SAMANTA

Compared to all other sectors in India, budget allocation for children is the minimum, said Dr. Pinaki Chakraborty, Chief-Social Policy, UNICEF, Chennai.

Dr. Chakraborty was speaking at a seminar on “Provision on allocation children in the union budget of India”, held in Asian College of Journalism on February 22.

The allocation for children has come down to 3.16 per cent in the 2020-21 Budget from 3.29 per cent in 2019-20, according to Haq, Centre for Child Rights website.

Chakraborty said the budget for children should take into account allocations for schemes in which children were involved. For instance, MNREGA empowers women and the wages they earn would enable them to provide for their children.

Questioning the Centre’s role, Chakraborty said, “If the example of the schemes like Sarva Siksha Abhiyan is taken into account, it is the Centre that funds them, but the States also give 40 percent.”

Commenting on the discretionary developmental expenditure, which accounts for 3.05 percent to 4 percent of the total GDP, states like Tamil Nadu and Kerala which the best developmental indicators, should be allowed to decide on their preferred expenditures and the Centre should not interfere with them.

“Combined government expenditures should increase. States have to be well managed for the Centre to allocate funds. Sometimes more funds end up going to the state that does not need them,” he said.

SPORTS NERDS



Sayantan Guha and Srinjoy Sanyal, students of the Asian College of Journalism beat 139 teams to bag the top prize in the Murugappa Group inter-collegiate sports quiz on February 26. Both the contestants received a prize money of Rs 10,000 each | GOAL QUIZ

South Asia Docufest to begin

SAYANTAN GUHA

Starting March 6, the Film South Asia Festival of Documentaries will be hosted by the Asian College of Journalism here.

One of the documentaries to be screened at the event, is *Bamboo Stories*, made by Shaheen Dill-Riaz, a Bangladeshi filmmaker. It encapsulates the story of men who fell wood and their journey of over 300 km with 25,000 tree trunks.

From Afghanistan, a documentary based on two women and their struggle to keep their rights and families safe in the country, will be screened.

Directed by Sedika Mojaddidi, *Facing the Dragon* is a mirror to the prevailing issues in Afghanistan.

On March 7, a lineup of documentaries from independent Indian filmmakers will run throughout the day.

Portraying the atrocities against Dalits in the country, Deepa Dhanraj’s 2019 documentary *We Have Not Come Here to Die* will be a must watch.

The Indian offerings will include documentaries from independent filmmakers Hemant Gaba and Supriyo Sen.

An Engineered Dream, Gaba’s

2018 documentary, is a take on the high-pressure coaching centres in Kota, which help students prepare for competitive exams.

Sen’s *Swimming through the Darkness*, was screened at the Busan International Film Festival 2018 and has already bagged four National Awards. It portrays the challenges and life-quest of a visually impaired swimmer.

Pakistani filmmaker Jawad Shariff’s *Indus Blues*, a documentary on the journey across Pakistan in search of disappearing folk musical instruments, will offer the audience a visual treat with breathtaking shots.

First Indian woman in the saddle

SANCHARI SAMANTA

Dressed in blue jacket and pants, wearing brown boots and a helmet and holding a set of thick gloves in one hand, Rupa Kanwar Singh patted the horse, calming him down after his first round of workout at the Madras Race Club.

Then she started instructing the newly enrolled male jockeys who were preparing for the week’s race. This has been a routine for Rupa since she was 21.

Born and brought up in Chennai, Rupa Kanwar Singh, is a Rajput by birth. She is said to be the ‘first Indian female jockey’.

She has won the ‘Annamalai Plate A-Class’ in one of the Madras Classics in 2010, the ‘Shikha Fatima Bint Mubarak Championship’ in Poland in the year 2014. She has also won races in Germany, Abu Dhabi and the Netherlands.

Recalling her first race, she said, “I still remember how I cried after the race because my horse threw me off. After so much of hard work for months, I couldn’t win the race. That’s when I understood it’s not going to be easy at all. It was only on September 7, in 2002, I won a race for the first time. I couldn’t sleep the entire night.”

Inspired by her grandfather, D. Ugam Singh Rathore, who was a horse trainer in the British Army, she says, “I never had any plan to become a professional jockey; horse riding was my hobby. Datha (‘grandfather’) played a vital role



Singh with her lucky horse ‘Powerpoint’ practicing for an upcoming race in Chennai | SANCHARI SAMANTA

then as he was the one who turned my hobby into passion.”

Recalling her childhood, 37-year-old Rupa Singh said, “I was just three when I first rode a horse. It was my Datha who taught me how to tackle a horse and how to hold the reins. He used to take me for a ride to a forest every evening. I also went to riding schools with him every morning.”

Her father, U. Narpat Singh being inspired by the Italian Silva Stora (only woman jockey in the world to have won two derbies in

1978) wanted to train Rupa as the first female jockey and encouraged her.

She said, “My father taught me the right posture to sit on horse while racing and to control race horse which is often ill-tempered.” Being a girl from an extremely orthodox culture, she was repeatedly discouraged by her relatives and family friends.

“I have seen jockeys losing their lives or becoming handicapped. My mother was scared initially. Luckily, my family never discour-

ged me,” she said.

Even after enduring severe fractures several times, including one on her collarbone, her passion for horses continued to infuse her with a strong emotion.

Unfortunately, the ‘first female’ jockey wasn’t welcomed. It was not only the horses that nickered her away but also her male trainers who never showed any interest in her capability.

“Any trainer would prefer a better and a stronger jockey on the horse to win the race. Girls are often looked down upon as both physically and mentally weak, so same happened with me. I was always put on average horses!”

“It was only after 50 races, that I was allowed to ride the better ones,” she said.

But nothing could stop her from participating in 4000 races and winning 727 national and international races.

Rupa Singh said it was not physical strength but mental strength that ultimately helped her succeed.

“Hard work and dedication is the only way to achieve physical strength, I believe”, Singh said.

Controlling, a 540 kg horse, running at a speed of 60 kmph has become a part and parcel of her life now.

Singh awaits to watch Tapsee Pannu enact her role on the silver screen, the shooting for which is going to begin this year. “I hope my biopic inspires more Indian women to take up the sports,” she said.

PRIYADA K S

The aforesaid highly skilled weaver along with his family members takes three days to weave this saree of 6.20 mtrs, and in this process moves his hand and legs 16,500 times. This weaver is in the weaving profession for the past 19 years. He expresses his gratitude to you, for bringing back the smile on his face!

This is the message on the tag attached to a saree at the Co-Optex (Tamil Nadu Handloom Weavers’ Cooperative Society) stall at Crafts Bazaar 2020.

Stalls from different states in India were part of the Craft Bazaar organized by the Crafts Council of India. The bazaar opened on February 22 and will be on till February 29 from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m.

The sales person at the co-Optex stall said that each weaver wove five sarees each on a price range of around Rs 2000 to Rs 3000.

Apindra Swain of Odisha whose stall exhibited decorative paintings done on cloth and bamboo said that 150 families in his village were involved in craft work.

Apindra said, “Sales are low compared to other years. The first three days were crowded but on Tuesday sales were very low”.

The same was the complaint from Chenchaiah from Andhra Pradesh. His stall had bright yellow and red coloured wall hangings and puppets.

Bhavm Sujith, the stall from Kerala was put up by a group of twenty people who work together



(Top left and right) Handcraft items designed by the Pattachitra artists from Odisha. (Bottom) Sellers from Antaran Itisree Sur display the ikat and sambalpur print handicrafts, unique to Odisha | PRIYADA K S

in the Waynad district in Kerala. The paintings were done on bamboo, in an eco-friendly way.

“This event happens every year; we were a part of it last year also. This helps in enhancing our business,” said Sujith.

Some of the handloom sarees at the Antaran. Itisree Sur Odisha were already booked by Raymond.

“Big companies like Raymond buy these products from us at Rs 4000 and double the rates when they sell it to retailers. We don’t get much profit by coming here but it will help us to connect with buyers and dealers and also our craft get exposure with these events. The profit we make here is just around 10 percent,” said Antaran.

Stories of unrecognised South Indian painters hit the screen

SHIVANAND S

“All these painters and sculptors are very well known in their fields, globally. They have received many national and international accolades but they still remain unknown to the people of their own state and countries,” said Gita Hudson painter and documentary filmmaker.

Six documentaries on Indian painters and sculptors made by Hudson were screened at the ‘Art Cinema’ event as part of the Madras Art Guild 2020. The event was held at the VR mall in Anna Nagar on February 22.

The event kick-started with the 30 minutes documentary on C. Douglas, ‘Black Mirror’. Douglas is a renowned Indian painter from Kerala who learnt painting in Government College of Arts and Crafts, Chennai. In the documen-

tary, Douglas takes us through his life of an artist, his inspirations and his process.

Douglas says in the documentary, “Most of my paintings have been inspired by Marina Tsvetaeva poems. I initially started painting, trying to visualize her poems.”

Douglas further talks about his process and the importance of proper usage of spaces in a painting. He says, “Spaces in a painting is as important as seconds of silence in music. The right amount of spaces can enhance the painting enormously.”

The second documentary was ‘Golden Flute’ on Alphonso Aruldoss, a painter from Bangalore who learned his craft in Government College of Fine Arts, Periyamet in Chennai.

Aruldoss has been in this profession for more than two decades. He



Perumal’s silhouette painting screened at ‘Art Cinema’ shows four men carrying a hunted deer | SHIVANAND S

is well known for creating marvels on Indian mythology and Gods using western painting techniques. He has also worked as a teacher at

the same college where he graduated.

He says in the documentary, “India is very rich in cultural

grounds. Many foreign artists take inspirations from here while we fail to recognise the beauty of it.”

Many of his students like J.K. Sabu Cyril and T. Muthuraj now work in the film industries as art directors. Sabu Cyril and Muthuraj have worked as art-directors in films like ‘Bahubali’ and ‘2.0’.

The third documentary, ‘First Light’ was on N. Sathyamoorthy who is from Poompuhar, a town in Nagapattinam district of Tamil Nadu.

Sathyamoorthy has won several national and state awards for his contribution to the craft. He has held many exhibitions in India, London and Singapore.

In the past he has been accused of portraying vulgarity through his nude paintings. He says in the documentary, “I never looked it as sexual or vulgarity. I believe in

portraying the nature in its purest form.” Sathyamoorthy currently works as a resident artist at Dakshinachitra.

The fourth documentary was on Perumal an artist from Tirunelveli. He specialises in portraying lives of people in rural India. He has painted only silhouettes.

Asked about the reason for using silhouettes in the documentary, he said that “You don’t need faces to portray or understand people’s emotions. I prefer showing it through actions.”

Perumal has also done a series of paintings on Jesus being crucified. He won Lalit Kala Akademi award, in 1991.

The last two documentaries were, ‘Sthapathy’s Manga’ and ‘Red Symphony’ on sculptor Vidya Sankar Sthapathy and Painter Achuthan Kudallur.

Sankar Sthapathy is a sculptor from Srirangam. He now makes statues of God, Goddesses and their ornaments in Brihadeeswara Temple, Thanjavur.

Achuthan Kudallur is also a graduate from the Government College of Arts and Crafts, Chennai. He has been trained under K. C. S. Paniker, a renowned Indian painter. Achuthan is known for his usage of flat colours and has also done graphic art. He has also worked with film director, K.V. Anand in a Tamil film, Anegan.

The session concluded with a Q/A session with Gita Hudson.

Asked about the reason for making these documentaries and on what basis the subjects were chosen she said, “The intention behind these documentaries was to promote these great artists and to promote the art through them.”