

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

# MADRAS MUSINGS

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a-MUSING



"I am missing you so much and don't know what to do without you darling!"

**Bye bye love, hello.... peace!**

Bags are packed, ill-used teens sulking over not being allowed to take a certain outfit ("It's too much for your grandparents, dear") are smiling again, AWOL tickets have been located – it's time for the summer holidays to begin.

In today's world, it isn't always Dad who's left behind, as Mom sometimes cannot get away from work too.

So, families compromise, dividing themselves into sections, rejoining later like pieces of jigsaw puzzles.

What of those who stay behind, forlorn in a suddenly empty house?

Let's see now.

To begin with, the silence. The blessed, healing silence which wraps itself around you like an old, familiar blanket you thought you had lost long ago. Too quiet? Then it's nice to be able to reach for the TV remote without having to grapple it from someone who is younger and stronger than you. You can watch an old movie, and sink into gooey nostalgia without swatting away protests and smart remarks.

No one bangs on the bathroom door.

You've earned a break from playing telephone operator to your kids – especially those old enough to have fearfully complicated social lives.

The car is yours – only yours, like your programmes.

You eat when (and what) you want, switch off lights only when you're sleepy, and run the fan at any speed you like.

Hmmm – not too shabby.

Maybe summer holidays should come around more often.

Ranjitha Ashok

## Can Adyar Creek eco park ignore estuary?

(By A Special Correspondent)

How can you ensure a successful eco park without sustaining its feed water systems and the natural wealth around it? That's the question that has to be answered before work can begin on the Adyar Creek Eco Park.

Chennai is one of the few cities in the world to have a large expanse of wetlands within it. The Adyar Creek, a natural estuarine ecosystem, extends over 350 acres right in the heart of the city, from the sandbar near the sea to the Chettinad Palace and beyond. Less than thirty years ago, it was rich with lush mangrove growth and home to a variety of flora and fauna. However, encroachments, the presence of cattle sheds, dumping of debris from the surrounding residential areas and 16 points from where untreated sewage is let in have caused the Creek to become polluted. The mangroves have vanished and as for the species of animals and birds, only the hardiest have survived.

Wetlands need to be protected as per the Ramsar Convention of 1971 to which India is also a signatory. Yet the Adyar Creek has remained largely neglected. Classified in 1895 as "poramboke" land, chances are that a century later it would have been completely built over, like the Lake Area in Nungambakkam, had it not been for the Consumer Action Group which in 1997 challenged the Government's decision to build a memorial for Dr. B.R. Ambedkar on the land. The area already housed the training centre of the Fisheries Department. The High Court in 2000 upheld the decision to build the memorial, but not to the extent originally envisaged and directed the Government to preserve the remaining wetlands.

On December 22, 2003, the State Government handed over 58 acres of the area to the city's Corporation to develop it into an eco park modelled on Tezomac in Mexico. Entries to the park were planned from Greenways Road and South Canal Bank Road. The GO specified that the flow of water along the Creek would not be disturbed, no concrete construction would be allowed and that the dumping of debris and the discharge of sewage would be curtailed. Construction of a 2.5 km compound wall at a cost of Rs 1.24 crore to protect the area began in mid 2004. It was also decided that around 14 acres of the land would be devoted to



The new enclosure for the proposed eco park.

the conservation of waterbodies. Work began on clearing the land of bushes and improving the quality of top soil with earth being brought in from lake beds in other parts of the city.

The budget for creating the park, Rs. 60 crore, was passed in 2005 and a special purpose ve-

hicle (SPV), Adyar Creek Eco Park Limited, was set up to harness and channel the funds for development. An Adyar Creek Trust was set up with the Chief Secretary as the Chairman and Secretaries of Highways, Forests, Fisheries, Municipal

(Continued on page 2)

## What's happening in Pallikaranai?

(By Shobha Menon)

• Pallikaranai wetland is a fresh water swamp and is one of the last few remaining natural ecosystems in the city of Chennai. It has been a home for naturally occurring plants (61 species), fish (46 species), birds (106 species), butterflies (7 species), reptiles (21 species) and some exotic floating vegetation such as water hyacinth and water lettuce, which are less extensive now and highly localized. Recent reports of the appearance of the white-spotted garden skink, for the first time in Tamilnadu, and Russell's viper, the largest and the most widespread among Asian vipers, confirm its invaluable ecological status. Fish such as dwarf gourami and chromides that are widely bred and traded worldwide for aquaria, occur naturally here. Besides, the windowpane oyster, mud crab, mullet, half beak and green chromide are some of the estuarine fauna present in the marsh.

A couple of weeks ago at the site, I watched smoke billowing across the marsh, a sickly disgusting black over the many Rosy (more 'Dirty') Pastors, sitting on a scorched-to-death tree beside a portion of the marsh

being insidiously suffocated by hydrangea. Dotting white the thick black smoke were a few egrets. And among piles of dirty garbage by the roadside, a whole family scrounged for scrap. "We make about Rs.100 per day

each," smiled a grimy soot encased Valli.

Just a kilometre ahead on the Thoraipakkam-Pallikaranai Road, a builder welcomes you to 'perfect living'... God forbid, living in this luxury can actually be a sin! Further down, beside a mound of filth, a roadside vendor of tender coconuts diligently wipes each shiny before the passing car windows roll down. The smoke gets worse as the day progresses, simply because more ugly mounds of plastic and thermocole plates that are remnants of some fancy party fuel more poisonous fires.

In 2002, there were 593 hectares of this wetland 'of international significance'; by 2006 more than 170 hectares have been totally decimated, (Continued on page 4)

# A City caught in a bandh

**T**he *Man from Madras Musings* had assumed that bandhs were a thing of the past as far as the city of Madras that is Chennai was concerned as EVERYONE had begun to talk of our city as a 21st Century city. However, MMM was quickly disabused of the notion when on the last day of the financial year 2006-07 a bandh was called – by the powers-that-be, no less.

With transport cut off, shops and offices forced to close, and banks and other public sector undertakings declaring a holiday under the NI Act, the bandh had only to be a success. The word success, however, is relative. Looking at it from another viewpoint, a bandh is also a complete failure. It is a failure of production when factories and offices do not operate, thereby resulting in a loss for the economy. It is a time of stress for students, who are preparing for examinations and suddenly see the schedules changed completely. To be fair, in the bandh just concluded the powers that be had exempted examinations from the observance, but with no public transport how could students reach the examination centres? The plight of passengers stranded in railway trains en-route and on platforms had to be seen to be believed. A bandh at year-closing brings its own problems. It also becomes a time of extortion when people requiring emergency services are forced to pay more. In the present instance, the bandh coincided with the Arupattumooval festival at the Kapaleeswarar Temple. MMM overheard many roadside vendors who set up shop that day complain about poor sales. Needless to add, a bandh also tarnishes the city's image of being a progressive place with a world class work ethic.

## Procession's progress

**I**t was evening time and *The Man from Madras Musings* was driving towards Nungambakkam High Road. Even from

the Gemini Circle it was clear that the traffic on NH Road was moving at a snail's pace. In fact, it would be no exaggeration to say that it had ground to a halt. Policemen did their best to wave the vehicles forward, but with no space to move ahead there was no progress whatsoever. After a good half an hour of inching forward, MMM came abreast of a wedding procession complete with a bridegroom on a horse in front of one of the big hotels on the road. The procession was moving at a leisurely pace with dancing women swirling around the horse and relatives walking along with it. Half of the road was blocked as a consequence.

The police stood watching the show and some were even tapping their feet to the music that was being howled out from an open truck that was leading the procession. MMM had as-

sumed that such pageants needed police permission and, given the joy which the assembled members of that service displayed, such permission had obviously been granted. It was all very puzzling to MMM who could not help but think that such processions were probably better suited to an era when NH Road was part of a residential district with just a few spacious bungalows and not one of the busiest commercial areas in a city which, according to the powers-that-be, is aiming to be a 21st Century city

## Greening the city

**T**he city's Corporation is at present debating its annual budget which contains, among other things, a fund for greening the city by planting more trees. *The Man from Madras Musings* who has seen

enough of such schemes knows exactly what will happen.

Saplings will be planted at certain spots with much fanfare and speechmaking. A protective cage will be placed around each sapling and a gardener from the Corporation will water the plants for a few days. Then this will be stopped. The saplings will die out and after that the cages will vanish. And that will be that till the next year's budget.

What we need is a fund for maintaining trees and planting new saplings. This fund must ensure that regular pruning of trees is done in addition to ensuring that concrete and tar are cleared from tree roots thereby exposing them to sunlight. Besides, the fund must ensure regular tending of saplings till they grow into large trees. In addition to all this, there must be a committee which can recommend the kind of trees that can grow in Chennai.

Bhaktavatsalam Road (Warren Road) is spelt variously as Bhaktavacchalam Road and Bhaktavatsalam Road. Can we please have some standardisation and quality control?

## The ICF area

**T**he Railways are being touted as a success story in India and the profits made this year are said to be phenomenal, with even Harvard University and MIT commending their performance. With surplus funds in the kitty, can something not be done about the general upkeep of the Perambur railway colony?

Many of the old colonial bungalows stand in the middle of large unkempt gardens and, going by the general impression, some of these bungalows appear to be marked for demolition as well. Which if it happens would be a tragedy.

## Chennai art deco

**W**hile the city is the home turf for Indo-Saracenic, Madras that is Chennai has also much to offer by way of art deco buildings. *The Man from Madras Musings* was privy to a conversation between two of the city's leading architects and it was their view that Art Deco was the first major style to have come into the city after Indo-Saracenic and that there was a time between the 1930s and the 1950s when almost every building here had some elements of it. MMM has since been enthused by this revelation and has managed to list at least a few remnants of the Art Deco style.

Some characteristic buildings would include theatres such as the Casino, Kamadhenu and Crown (which, alas, is now demolished save the façade). The late lamented Kapali Theatre was also a fine example, as also was the Oceanic Hotel. Yet another threatened art deco classic is the Dasaprakash Hotel. Those that appear to be going strong are the series of buildings on NSC Bose Road, beginning with Dare House, the State Bank of Mysore building and a few others. The Taj Connemara is yet another art deco creation as is also the Speed-A-Way building and its neighbour, Lucas Auto Parts, at the Mount Road-Patullo's Road corner. Would the half-collapsed and dreadfully maintained Klein and Peyerl building also qualify as art deco, MMM wonders. What, however, will pass muster without fail is the office of *The Hindu*. With so many front-ranking buildings and many more residential properties built in the same style, it is high time a book on Art Deco in the city came out. Mumbai has stolen a march and it was only recently that a book on the subject was released there. Interestingly, a search of the web does not even list Chennai as a location for Art Deco buildings.

MMM

## SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

Too often, trees that are alien to this climate are mindlessly planted, with the result that they fall down during the monsoons, causing needless damage.

## Road names

**A**part from our politicians who keep renaming roads, *The Man from Madras Musings* notices, the contractors who at the behest of the Corporation paint road names keep effecting small and subtle changes. Thus Sripuram Lane had become Puram Lane in Tamil, there possibly being no space for the Sri or, perhaps, it had been left out by oversight. Similarly, for some reason, Kelly's has become Killiyur Road, but there is no historical record of a Killiyur. Lang's Garden Road has become Long's Garden Road and Barnaby Road is spelt in Tamil as Burnaby Road.

The Railways have, generally, been heritage-conscious and *The Man from Madras Musings* hopes that the surroundings of ICF will see better days.

## Art mart

**N**ow whoever it was that said that Chennai is forever lagging behind ought to have been at the art auction of pictures by well-known present-day Madras artists that was held a couple of weeks ago at the Taj Coromandel. There were business barons, society figures, representatives of art galleries, and some noted and serious art collectors as well. The figures at which the paintings were knocked down were truly astronomical and well beyond the reach of *The Man from Madras Musings'* pocket. But it felt good to be living in the same city as so many well-heeled patrons.

## CAN ADYAR CREEK ECO PARK IGNORE ESTUARY?

(Continued from Page 1)

Administration & Water Supply and Finance Departments as members.

With the change of Government, however, things went into cold storage. The area remained as desolate as it was and ecologists once again began worrying about its future, what with rampant construction coming up on private lands adjoining the creek. There was also a question of how only a

part, namely 58 acres of the total land, could be developed **without access to the water of the estuary which was vital for the survival and viability of the park.** If the remaining area was allowed to degrade, environmentalists felt, the protected 58 acres would not be sustained as a natural habitat.

The matter appears to have been revived now with the Government allotting Rs. 100 crore in its latest budget for the development of the Park. How-

ever, the same amount was allocated last year as well and it is not clear as to how much of it was spent and on what activities concerning the Eco Park. The Tamil Nadu Urban Infrastructure Financial Services Limited has been appointed the coordinating agency and consultants from Auroville have been brought in to advise.

Environmentalists have now begun pressing for the protection of the entire 358 acres as that would be in the spirit of the

High Court judgement of 2000. It would also ensure that the water would be cleaned up and further pollution prevented. The present limited area development would only protect the land and leave the water in its present condition, according to the environmentalists. The Chennai Corporation, however, maintains that its mandate only concerns the original 58 acres. It plans to have a heritage walk (whatever that means in an Eco Park!), an aquarium (more con-

crete construction?), and mangrove walks (minus the mangroves?). In addition, the dilapidated building inside the compound will be redone to become an information centre. The building at present houses unfinished signboards planned for the park.

However, the authorities should realise that time is running out. Six years to get moving on a court decision is slow even by Government standards.

**OUR  
READERS  
WRITE**



### Marina charms

I was aghast to learn from 'Fancy ideas not needed' (MM, March 16<sup>th</sup>) that our City Fathers want to build cabins for hawkers on the Marina. These hawkers now bring their stuff on pushcarts and wheel them away at nightfall. If cabins are provided, it will be the genesis of another Burma Bazaar and become an eyesore. As the Marina is inseparable from the charm of old Madras, heritage activists should dissuade the Corporation from this proposal.

On 'Rebuilding Foreshore's fishing hamlets', instead of spending Rs.138 crore for building new tenements on the beach, if the Corporation gives a fraction thereof to the fisherfolk to quit the place, that will beautify the Marina like nothing else.

**C.G. Prasad**  
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### Water policy needed

The lead article (MM 01.04.07) "Threatened Beach front?" reveals several far

reaching proposals by the Government Agencies for construction of highrises coming up along the MRC Nagar stretch apart from reconstruction of fishing hamlets etc. One is made to wonder as to how the precious water is going to be procured for all such constructions and after their construction, for use by the occupants. We seem to be having lopsided priorities. There has been no appreciable attempts to augment the water resources for the burgeoning city; on the other hand, even the existing water bodies are being systematically wiped out.

I would like to state that when King Rajendra Cholan shifted his capital from Thanjavur to Gangai Konda Cholapuram, the first thing he did was to create Veeranarayanapuram Eri i.e., Veeranam Eri (which partially meets the city's requirement now) and then only he began to form his capital city! That forethought seems to be lacking now.

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No personal visits or telephone calls, please. Letters received will be sent from these addresses every couple of days to the persons concerned and you will get an answer from them to your queries reasonably quickly. Strange as it may seem, if you adopt the 'snail mail' approach, we will be able to help you faster and disappoint you less.

**THE EDITOR**

# AUSTRALIA – The South Indian Connection

Simeon Mascarenhas is perfectly correct in his following conclusion in his article 'South Indian maps – and South Indians in Terra Australia' (MM, Feb 1st):

"Far fetched as it might seem, there is an element of truth in the juxtaposition of the 'terra australis' and 'South Indians', I have do doubt whatsoever that the aboriginals of Australia are proto-Dravidians;..."

The latest findings of scientists, scholars and linguists more or less uphold the following propositions and consequently the conclusion of Mascaranhas.

- i) Anatomically Modern Humans (AMH), i.e. all the 640 crore humans now on earth originated about 1,40,000 years ago in Africa. Only AMH had the faculty of speech – not the earlier (now extinct) species, Homo Erectus, Homo Neandarthal, etc.
- ii) Speech evolved among AMH (i.e. among us) only about 50,000 years ago. Many palaeoethnologists think that it was Language which was the cause of AMH spreading quickly to Asia and Europe (and superseding, by extermination, the earlier species – Peking man, Attirampakkam, Java man, etc. – which had established themselves for a few lakhs of years in Asia and Europe).
- iii) AMH spread to Australia some 50,000 years ago, earlier than AMH spread to Europe, Northern Asia, etc. The spread might have been along the Continental shelf of South India – See N.C. Flemming's article in *Current Science*, May 10, 2004. Studies on mother tongue of man and macrofamilies of language, like the Nostratic family, hypothesise that proto-Dravidian might have been coeval with or even older than proto Indo-European. In the year book of *South Asian Languages and Linguistics, 2001*, the Indo-European linguist Colin P. Masica says, apropos the affinities of Dravidian languages with Australian Aboriginal languages, "It may be a question of a very ancient common substratum in South Asia, pre-Dravidian, going back even to the original peopling of the world (circa 50,000 years ago by AMH spreading out of Africa, through South India).
- iv) Though Australian aborigines remained cut off from the world till 1800 AD, after the submersion of Continental shelf by sea throughout the world about 8000 BC (when the continent was deprived of land connec-

tion with the rest of the world), they still retain in their languages remarkable glossarial, phonetic and grammatical affinities with Tamil. (For details see pp 5-7 and 12-13 of my article: 'Direction of movement of Dravidian speakers in prehistoric times' in *Dravidian Studies* (of Dravidian University, Kuppam, I-3; April-June 2003.) Details are repeated again at pp 82-83 and 96-97 of my article: 'Situating Indus Valley civilisation in the Proto-history of India' in *The Pilc Journal of Dravidic Studies* Vol. 12 (2002) released in 2004.

While Mascarenhas' proposition that aboriginals of Australia are proto-Dravidians is perfectly sound in the light of latest findings in the fields of Palaeoanthropology, Palaeo-linguistics, etc, he is certainly wrong when he goes on to give the justification viz. "since Australia and South India, together with Malaysia and Indonesia were once joined in the land mass called Gondwanaland."

After the 1960s the world of science has unequivocally accepted the theory of "continents in motion" and "plate tectonics" and holds axiomatically that no land mass of continental portions, Gondwanaland/Lemuria/Kumarikandam or Atlantics or Muever, got submerged under the sea.

All the continental masses attained their present boundaries about one crore years ago – i.e. even before Apes appeared, not to speak of AMH who appeared just about 1,40,000 years ago.

Probably much of what I have mentioned above cannot be appreciated at the first reading, but a careful perusal of my referred articles may help in better appreciation. Of course, you may not have the leisure to go deep into this. But, I suggest that, if it be not too much trouble, a copy of this letter with the two enclosed articles in ORIGINAL can be sent to Mascaranhas in Australia, so that he is able to pursue well his perfectly valid hypothesis (but without relying on the Gondwanaland myth). He has solid Anthropological and Linguistic support to pursue his hypothesis. I wish him the best of luck in his researches. I will be glad also to furnish him additional information or copies of publications.

**P. Ramanathan, M.A., B.L.**  
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## Kotturpuram in the 60s

Who would ever believe that in the sixties, a jungle existed along the banks of the Adyar river?

And in the midst of it stood a lone, white, palatial bungalow, belonging to M.A. Chidambaram. Adjacent to it were a Kottur village and the campus of Guindy Engineering College (now the Anna University campus).

A. Ranganathan (81), a student of the college in the 1940s, recalls, "There were huts, fields and a lake in Kottur and only about eight houses in the Ponniamman Temple area."

Srinivasa Bhattar, the temple priest in Kottur village, says, "The 970-year-old Srinivasa temple had only the main shrine. There were huts all around the temple."

Tulsi Raman, a senior citizen of Kottur, says, "The mode of transport was boat. The boats brought in wooden logs and salt from Marakkanam on the Buckingham Canal and stopped

Subramaniam (the late Union Minister and Governor of Maharashtra).

A.C. Muthiah talks about the time when his father moved into the *Adyar House*. He says,

● by **AVANTIKA KANNAN**

*A class XI student in Vidya Mandir SSS, Mylapore*

at Kottur market (a site where the MRTS Kotturpuram station stands today) before proceeding towards the port. Kottur was practically an island then.

There was a ferry service to Mylapore from Kottur, and the closest bus stop was near the Adyar banyan tree landmark. "The fare was 5 paise," recalls S.S. Rajasekar, son of C.

"People were scared to enter the forest. There were orchards with mangoes, guavas and sapota."

Today, the area is called Kottur Gardens. Kottur Garden Extension was just a paddy and chilli field. There was a pond where the Corporation playground is today.

"My father M.A. Chidam-

baram and A.M.M. Chettiar acquired the area in settlement of a loan. And a coin was tossed to divide the land," he says.

M.A. Chidambaram met Kanchi Sankaracharya to ask him if it would be suitable to build a home in the area. The seer was seated under a gooseberry tree when a fruit fell. He predicted that the water in the area would be very sweet and that learned people would occupy the area. So goes the story.

No wonder that Kotturpuram boasts of two Presidents, R. Venkatraman and A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, three *Bharat Ratnas* (C. Subramaniam, M.S. Subbulakshmi and Abdul Kalam) and *Padma Vibhushan* awardee and Carnatic music maestro, D.K. Pattammal. — (Courtesy: *Adyar Times*).

### READABILITY PLEASE

Dear Readers,

As letters from readers increase, we are receiving more and more **hand written** letters, many of them in a hand so small and illegible or large and scrawled as to be unreadable. Often this leads to our discarding a letter, particularly if some part of it is unreadable.

If you wish us to consider your letter for publication, please type it with enough space between lines or write it using a medium hand, clearly dotting the 'i-s' and crossing the 't-s'.

Many readers also try to fill every square centimetre of a postcard space, making reading or editing impossible.

Please help us to consider your letters more favourably by making them more legible for us.

**THE EDITOR**

# Reality at Elliotts Beach

• The Elliotts Beach has recently been in the news thanks to the “beautification” threat. What regulars in the beach want (and this includes fishermen), is a clean beachfront that is all. A set of photographs recently taken by C.P. Dhanashekar of the *Adyar Times* however shows the poor maintenance and public indiscipline at the Beach. — (Pictures Courtesy: *Adyar Times*.)



Indiscriminate littering near the fishing boats and nets.



Stagnant water.



Dogs foraging in the garbage.



Above: Urinating in the shadow of the memorial and Below: uncleared garbage.



Till 18: Artists demonstration - Exhibition of paintings and installation by C.H. Manohar and a demonstration by the artist. (At Lalit Kala Academy.)

April 19: *Sahasam* - Bharatanatyam dance performance by Priyadarshini Govind and Elizabeth Petit (At Alliance Francaise, 7 p.m.)



Till April 20: *Painting Exhibition* - Display of the works of Shivaram. (At Vinnyasa Premier Gallery.)

April 20: *King and the Clown* - Korean film with English subtitles. Call 2436 1224 or email gomathi@inkocentre.org to register as seating capacity is limited. (At InKo Centre, 7 p.m.)

April 20-30: *Group Show* - An exhibition of paintings by various artists from all over India. (At Vinnyasa Premier Gallery.)

April 21-22 : *Gujarati Toran* - Toran is the most common embroidered doorway decoration with hanging flaps. These colourful ritual decorations embroidered with silk thread have become a part of the ethnic chic fashionworld. Resource person Ms. Jasiben will demonstrate simple techniques to make doorways, ushering in the promise of good luck! Course fee Rs.500/- per person for two days (at DakshinaChitra).

April 26: *Music Concert* - Performance by percussionist David Mirandon and accordionist Regis Gizavo. (At Alliance Francaise.)

## WHAT'S HAPPENING IN PALLIKARANAI?

(Continued from page 1)

almost irretrievably. Ironic that successive Governments have clucked sympathetically, and continued to allow the destruction of the marsh, and most others continue to remain unmoved by the systematic degradation of a natural heritage. And the few who do have remained unheard for long.

When one NGO had the air around the continually burning garbage analysed to find that its level of toxic concentration 30,000 times more than the prescribed safe level, the Government's response was that they were in the process of 'their own study which would take another six months'. Till a few years ago, the Metrowater and the municipality were regu-

larly discharging raw sewage into the marsh, affecting the groundwater in several surrounding areas. Currently, the sewage being discharged is 'just better treated, with 'only physical impurities being removed', according to concerned naturalists. And the treatment plant is still officially, 'under stabilization'.

V.Srinivasan, of the Save Pallikaranai Marsh Forum, says, "A tragedy that this sensitive wetland is shown as wasteland in Revenue Records. Originally 2 km by 50 km, now reduced to a tenth of that area. The original 200 acres of marshland that was given to Corporaton as a dumpyard, could now be over 400 acres. Meanwhile government authorities, at different points, manipulate stakehold-

ers, environmentalists, residents associations oblivious to the fact that any development/construction activity is an inexorable ride to disaster." The population of waders, of the kind seen in Pallikaranai are in decline worldwide, and activists had even appealed to the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests that Pallikaranai be designated as a wetland of international importance, under the Ramsar Convention.

There have already been a dozen or more grandiose plans drawn up for this 'wasteland' that is of such critical value to the environment. The latest, a few years ago, to drain the marsh and put up a golf course - on the southern side of the marsh adjoining Thoraipakkam and considered prime wetland

area - was scrapped in 2004, AND rescrapped in 2006!

Positive developments however are expected in a few weeks. Says Jayshree Vencatesan of Care Earth, an NGO that has been fighting on behalf of the marsh since 2002, "The government should react sooner to environmental issues in an area of critical significance. Effective fencing on the outer limits of the marsh could help protect the wetland. As far as the garbage dump is concerned it has to be slowly and carefully restored to wetland status. More important, a checkpoint needs to be set up on the Thoraipakkam Link Road as well as the Perungudi site that is slowly encroaching into marsh area, besides regular patrolling and removal of en-

croachments from Perungudi side. And the canals laid across the newly come-up Mylai Balaji Nagar (the resettlement area for those displaced by the MRTS that fragments the marsh further) need to be periodically cleaned of the thermocole and plastic that clog the system."

Last month, visitors to the Pallikaranai marshland were pleasantly surprised to sight a good number of spot-billed pelicans, not sighted in the last 15 years. Could this mean a ringing in of the good times? Certainly it can be a win-win situation, provided the government comprehends what declaring the area as a 'Reserve Forest' and allowing the birds to come back to their wetland haunts can mean to the city's all-round development, in every sense.

# Travellers' tales

*Will they light a spark or two here?*

● **The city of Madras that is Chennai sees a major exodus of the affluent to milder climes come April/May. The most popular option is to join a package tour. There is much to be said in favour of this. The itinerary is fixed, all needs are taken care of and the holiday maker can relax and be led. However there is also a thrill in for making your own plans, detailing your own route and also at times striking that bargain deal when it comes to accommodation that makes all the difference. You also get to see much more of a lot fewer places and above all it is a personalised experience. Read on to see what joys such a holiday has to offer.**

— The Editor

Given a gift holiday by my son Arun, we decided to visit Paris, Rome, Florence, Venice, Vienna, Prague and Budapest. London would be the point of entry and departure. We had two months to make firm plans. We heeded the advice of travel writer, Jan Morris: 'Don't try to see everything.'

Sriyani and I read a great deal (in books, magazines and the Internet) about the cities we planned to visit. I made brief notes about each place, photocopied pages from books and filed them in a ring-binder to carry with us for reference as we toured the cities. We spent hours scouring the Internet for accommodation – just a clean room, with clean bath and toilet at a price that would not bust our wallet. An old friend, advised us, "At the end of the day,

when your feet have taken a terrific pounding, you need to have a nice, comfortable place to go to for rest"

\* \* \*

Occasional day shopping trips from London to Calais and surrounding towns in France are now commonplace. People get up at 6 a.m., drive to the Channel Tunnel entrance (about 90 minutes), put their car on the Eurotunnel Shuttle, go under the Chunnel and drive off 35 minutes later in Calais. Then they go either south to Etaples, for the market (Tuesday and Friday), or concentrate on Cite Europe, a huge shopping mall near Calais 'which has everything'. They manage to squeeze in a nice lunch. The range of vegetables and fruit is much wider than in London,

and also a lot fresher, as most of the produce at the market comes direct from nearby farms. Markets are the norm in most French towns and villages. Overall, food and wine are about one-third cheaper than in England. This is especially true of wine and spirits: whisky is half price and wine is two-thirds. If they buy enough produce they can pay for the cost of the trip, which varies from about £32 to about £40, depending on times of departure and return. They usually get home by 7 p.m. and demolish some of the goodies purchased, including religieuse (cream and pastry confections shaped like nuns – hence the name).

Early one morning, we boarded Eurostar for the journey to Paris. We reached Paris at 1.30 pm. The best way to get about in Paris is by Metro and on foot.

Our routine during the week in Paris was as follows: Breakfast at around 8.00 a.m. –

● **by ABEY & SRIYANI**

enough of a tuck-in to keep us going without a big meal until around six-thirty. In our back packs we carried some snacks, such as packets of mini rusks and slices of cake, fruits and a bottle of drinking water. This was our lunch; it cut our costs considerably, as eating out in Paris is expensive. We would return to the hotel at around five for a lie-down, then shower and go out again at around six-thirty to dine, see more of the sights and return to the hotel at around midnight.

Paris's strict building regulations have ensured that the city's roofline is not jagged by buildings of varying heights and designs. There are no skyscrapers, except in an area of urban construction begun in the later 1950s – the La Défence area – where modern highrise buildings of concrete, steel and glass proclaim the city's corporate might.

Paris gets some 75 million visitors in the course of a year, which might explain why Parisians appear to be blasé about tourists. And in the evenings especially, as there are often more Blacks (from Morocco, Algeria, Sierra Leone) than Whites in the Metro, Parisians must feel uneasy about the changing ethnic mix of their country. When



brought together in the Metro, a Frenchman/Frenchwoman would not know who is a Parisian and who is not. There is little conversation. The people who most often started a conversation with us were students.

At the Champs Élysées we experienced the only scare of our entire trip. One evening we were seated on a three-sided bench watching the passing parade. There were some men seated on the other two sides; one of them had a small leather bag held at waist-level by a leather strap slung across his neck. Two motorcyclists stopped by the curb. In a flash, one of the men seated on the bench cut the leather strap to free the bag from the victim and

whistle designed to emit, when blown, a piercing sound to unsettle approaching crooks.

After scouring the Internet for several hours, we booked accommodation in Rome, Florence and Venice. Accommodation in these cities is expensive. We picked medium-priced accommodation after reading reviews by visitors.

The Sistine Chapel was the main reason for our stopover in Rome... the queue of people lined up outside the Chapel was long. A young woman walked up to us to enquire whether we would pay 35 euros each to gain quick entry into the Chapel. This was expensive but we said 'yes' as we were booked to take Eurail to Florence that evening and we did not want to spend hours in a queue. It was a good thing we had paid for a guide to draw our attention to some of the masterpieces. If we stopped for ten minutes to look at each of the masterpieces in the chapel, we would be there for twenty-four years, the guide told us. I believed her.

Florence is a small city, once leading the world in art, science and political idealism. It was the cradle of the Renaissance. It is a city made for walking.

Florentines are today chiefly concerned with the business of keeping their city beautiful, peaceful and clean for the millions of tourists who come every year; so it comes as a surprise to learn so much of artistic endeavour thrived during a period of civil strife.

After doing the round of several monuments, we took heed of a warning regarding a sickness that strikes many foreign visitors to Florence. Symptoms of the illness are dizziness, depression and disorientation arising from overexposure to so many art and architectural works of a great culture. In order to avoid this sickness, we took an all-day coach tour through the delightful hills of the Chianti countryside to Siena.

We said goodbye to Florence and took Eurail to Venice – two hours away.

(To be continued)



Quizzin'  
with  
Ram'nan

# Presidency College buildings

## *An early 20th century account*

(Current Affairs questions are from the period March 16th to 31st. Questions 11 to 20 pertain to Tamil Nadu and Chennai.)

1. Name the bowler who was smashed for six sixes by Herschelle Gibbs on March 16<sup>th</sup>?
2. Name the private TV channel in Pakistan that was attacked by policemen leading to condemnation and an apology from President Pervez Musharraf.
3. Who is the new chief coach of the Indian men's hockey team?
4. Name the Supreme Court judge who received an anonymous fax that led to his breaking down, and recusing himself from a Mulayam Singh Yadav case.
5. Name the naval variant of the Prithvi missile that was successfully tested on March 30<sup>th</sup>.
6. On which Nobel Laureate did President Abdul Kalam confer the prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding 2005 on March 22<sup>nd</sup>?
7. Which famous English musician, born Reginald Kenneth Dwight, celebrated his 60th birthday on March 25<sup>th</sup>?
8. March 24<sup>th</sup> is observed as World \_\_\_\_\_ Day for which global epidemic known by its two-letter abbreviation?
9. In which Capital city did the UN Secretary-General escape unhurt on March 22<sup>nd</sup> after a live news conference was rocked by a mortar attack?
10. Who won the first F1 GP of the year on March 18<sup>th</sup> at Melbourne?

\* \* \*

11. Which MP from Tamil Nadu has written works like 'Pakistan Papers' and 'Remembering Rajiv'?
12. Name the presiding deity at the 'divyadesam' temple in Thiru Indhaloor, Mayavaram?
13. Which king created 'Gangaikonda Cholapuram' as the capital of the Cholas?
14. Where is the New Jerusalem Church, consecrated by Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg in 1718, located?
15. Under which Treaty did the French return Madras to the British in 1748 after it was captured in 1746?
16. Who is the Deputy Mayor of the Corporation of Chennai?
17. Rasipuram and Paramathivelur are taluks of which District?
18. After whom is Chennai's Collectorate Building named?
19. P.K. Sekar Babu is the MLA from which Chennai constituency?
20. The now-disputed Andal Azhagar Kalyana Mandapam in Chennai is owned by which film personality's family?

(Answers on page 8)



The Presidency College provides instruction upto the standards of the First Examination in Arts and B.A. and M.A. degree examinations of the Madras University in English Language and Literature, certain Indian classical and vernacular languages, chemistry, biology (including botany and zoology), geology, mathematics, physics, history and mental and moral science, and possesses a staff of nine professors, ten assistant professors, six masters of classical and vernacular languages, a gymnastic instructor and three demonstrators. There are ordinarily from 400 to 500 students on its rolls.

The college buildings occupy a very open position on the Marina. The main building was opened in 1870. It consisted of an entrance hall with staircase and ranges of class rooms on two floors and a library and college hall (neither of which is now used as originally intended), each extending almost to the height of the two floors. Science laboratories and lecture rooms were added after the appointment of a professor of science in 1874 and the accommodation for chemistry was subsequently extended and occupies the whole of the existing south wing. In 1886, in order to provide accommodation for the newly-appointed professor of biology, a floor was put into the library, and in 1896, in order to provide an additional large lecture room for English, the college hall was similarly treated. In 1897 the northern wing, containing accommodation for the professor of physics and additional rooms for the professor of biology, was completed. In 1908 a further addition in the center of the façade consisting of large rooms upstairs and down and carriage porches, each with a small room over it, was completed. This has made necessary a rearrangement of the principal staircase, which is now in progress.

The building, as now completed, therefore, consists of the main building which faces the sea with a central block thrown out to the east and two wings extending towards the west. It will be seen from the history of the building given above that this form was not the result of a preconceived plan and neither it, nor the aspect of the college, due east, appears particularly adapted to the climatic conditions of Madras. But the necessity of aligning the building with the beach road and the position of the land available for exten-

sions made the aspect and plan practically inevitable, and the college is certainly among the coolest and airiest of the public buildings of Madras.

• Adapted from: *Educational Buildings in India*, published by Superintendent, Government Printing Press, Calcutta, 1911.

The building is of brick, the lower courses being faced with

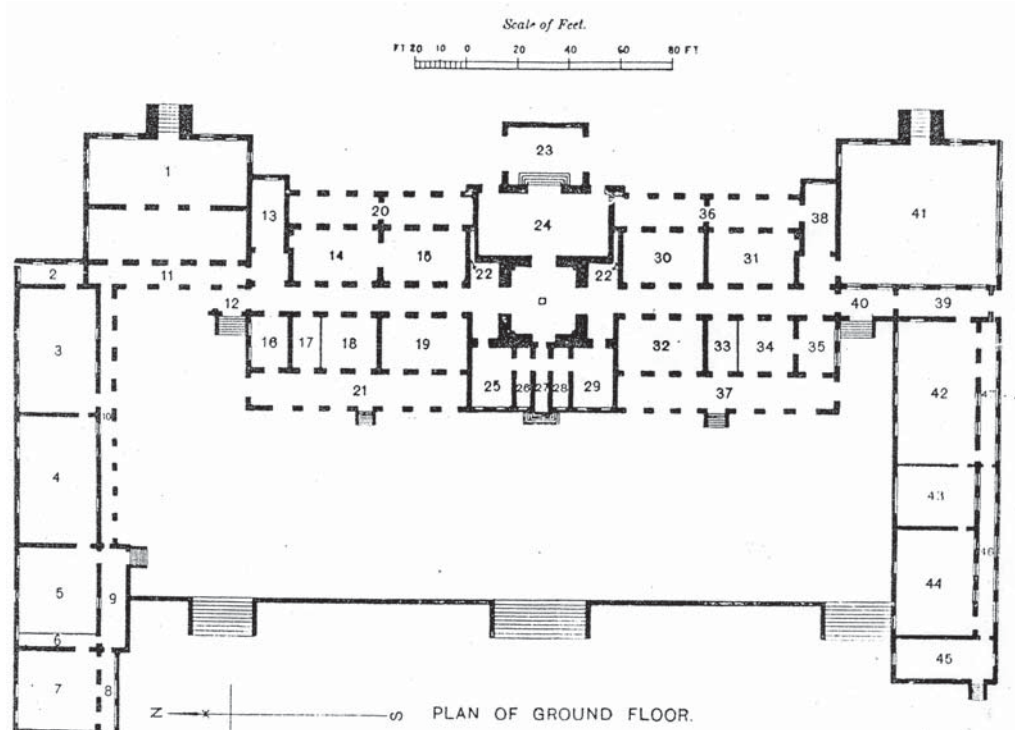
stone. The pillars and pilasters and the window arches are also of stone. The original main building has a façade of 350 ft. It consists of a main hall with staircase, 16 classrooms of equal size, 20 ft. by 33 ft., arranged on the two floors on each side of central corridors 10 ft. wide. Each room is lighted by three windows and has three doors opening on to the corridor and is furnished with rising tiers of benches and narrow desks. The corridors have clerestory lights. There is a smaller staircase at each end of the corridors, and four small rooms occupying the space at the back of the building corresponding to that taken by these staircases in the front. Behind the entrance hall upstairs and down are common rooms for the professors and assistant professors, and one or two of the classrooms have been partitioned off to provide office accommodation and rooms for professors. The main building (excluding the hall and library) and the new front block have 11 ft. verandahs. The wings have 6

ft. verandahs towards the south only. The class-rooms in the main building are 30 ft. by 20 ft., the old library 60 ft. by 45 ft., the old college hall 60ft. by 54 ft. The old library is now temporarily occupied by the zoology class. The old hall is now the library and the room over it is to be the college hall and will also be used for lecturing. The rooms in the wings are 30 ft. in depth and vary in length from 55 ft. to 18 ft. The total area devoted to each scientific department is biology 5,520 sq. ft., physics 7,050 sq. ft., chemistry 8,820 sq.ft.

Since the requirements of the new University Regulations will necessitate some rearrangement of the laboratories it does not seem worthwhile to enter into details of the uses to which the different rooms are now put. All the science laboratories and lecture rooms are very completely furnished and equipped.

To the south of the college is an oil gas installation and gas is laid on for laboratory requirements. The physics laboratory contains an electrical installation and the rooms are lit from it. The question of providing electric lights and fans for the whole college is under consideration. Water is laid on to the laboratories and drainage is into the municipal system.

The college has two playing fields used for cricket and football and hockey, respectively, five lawn tennis courts, and the usual gymnastic apparatus. There is also ample tiffin room and latrine accommodation for students. There is no boarding accommodation but about a quarter of the students live in the adjoining Victoria Students' Hostel, the warden of which is a professor of the college.



**• ARTLESS INNOCENTS AND IVORY-TOWER SOPHISTICATES**  
**– The Fourth article in a five-part series\*.**

# The Frenchman and the Tamilian

Another major figure in Indian mathematics was Minakshisundaram, and I will refer to him as Minakshi, as he was known to his friends. He was born in Trissur, Kerala, in 1913. He had his early education in Madras and took his B.A. (Honours) degree from Loyola College, Madras. He became a research scholar at Madras University under Ananda Rau. This naturally led him to work on Tauberian theorems and he produced work of very high quality in the area. However, in 1937-38, he came once again under the influence of his erstwhile teacher at Loyola College, Rev. Father Racine, a remarkable Frenchman whose contribution to mathematics in India has been extraordinary.

Father Racine was born at Tomay-Charente in France in 1897. He enlisted for active service during World War I in 1916 and was demobilised three years later after an ankle injury that left a limp for the rest of his life. He then entered the Jesuit order and was ordained a priest in 1929. He spent four years studying mathematics in Paris and obtained a doctorate in 1934. He was sent to India to work at St. Joseph's College, Tiruchchirappalli. He moved to Loyola College, Madras, in 1939 and stayed there till his death in 1976, nine years after his retirement in 1967.

Father Racine had worked

with Elie Cartan and Hadamard, both legendary figures in mathematics. He counted Andre Weil and Henri Cartan (another famous mathematician and Elie Cartan's son) among his friends. With this background, Racine naturally had an excellent perspective on mathematics, which he brought to India with him. He began weaning some Indian mathematicians away from traditional Cambridge-inspired areas and Minakshi was his first big success, and there was a galaxy of brilliant students to follow; the list would occupy substantial space in any 'who's who' of Indian mathematics. To mention a few names: K.G.



Rev. Father Racine.



S. Minakshisundaram.

ably good at spotting talent and then encouraging it. He liked talking informally to his stu-

the 42 years he spent in India, he made only two trips to France; yet he remained very much a Frenchman. But there can be little doubt that he loved India more than France. I was not privileged to be his student, but remember with pleasure the one long and informal meeting I had with him in the company of my teacher M.S. Narasimhan. He was an excellent example – by no means unique – of the coexistence of the cassock with a lively disposition.

To get back to Minakshisundaram. He took his D.Sc. degree at the Madras University in 1940. He then found himself hopelessly stranded without a job. Father Racine helped him earn some money by arranging for him to coach a few students, till he was

appointed a lecturer in the Department of Mathematical Physics at Andhra University in Waltair.

He was arguably the most gifted Indian mathematician of his generation. His best work, some of it in collaboration with a Canadian, Pleijel, was carried out in Princeton at the Institute for Advanced Study during 1946-48, when he was visiting there. The Princeton visit materialised, thanks to the efforts of Marshall Harvey Stone, an American mathematician of the first rank, who visited India in 1946 and made more trips later. Stone was also responsible for many other Indians visiting the institute in Princeton. That institute has certainly had a big role – even as Cambridge in an earlier epoch – in shaping Indian mathematics.

Minakshisundaram returned to India after Princeton and was promoted to a professorship at Andhra University... As years went by, he found the university milieu stifling for creative work. He had problems getting along with some colleagues, whose mathematical credentials were nowhere near his. Minimal contact with really first-rate minds was all that he needed to produce work of quality, but the university was unable to provide him that. He was eventually appointed professor at the then newly formed Institute of Advanced Study in Simla and was very happy to move there – there was isolation still, but at least in other respects the prospects were pleasanter. He embarked on writing a book on Spectral Theory, but unfortunately died in 1968 without completing it. (Courtesy: The author who is with the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, and *Current Science*, 2003.)

(To be continued)

● by **M.S. RAGHUNATHAN**

Ramanathan, C.S. Seshadri, M.S. Narasimhan, Raghavan Narasimhan and C.P. Ramanujam.

Father Racine was apparently not an exciting speaker. Students found his classroom lectures difficult to follow. His French accent combined with what amounted to mumbling to the blackboard, made things worse. It was, however, outside the classroom that his influence was decisive. He was remark-

dents, especially the talented ones, and gave them invaluable advice in their career decisions.

Mathematical activity was by no means Father Racine's sole preoccupation. Apparently, he was a spiritual adviser to the Jesuit community of the college and was engaged in resolving personal problems for the Catholic laity around him. The French government conferred on him the coveted 'Legion d'honneur' in 1962. In all

\*Excerpts from a public lecture delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Indian Academy of Sciences, held at Chandigarh in 2002.

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— The Editor

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# The Birth of Round Table No.1, India – Madras

A provisional Chapter of Round Table, India, was inaugurated in 1957 – the first in the country. This table was chartered on April 19, 1959 in Madras, and was followed by one in Bombay that was inaugurated on April 22, 1959. Dr. Peter Bush, President of Round Table International, was to do the chartering in person.

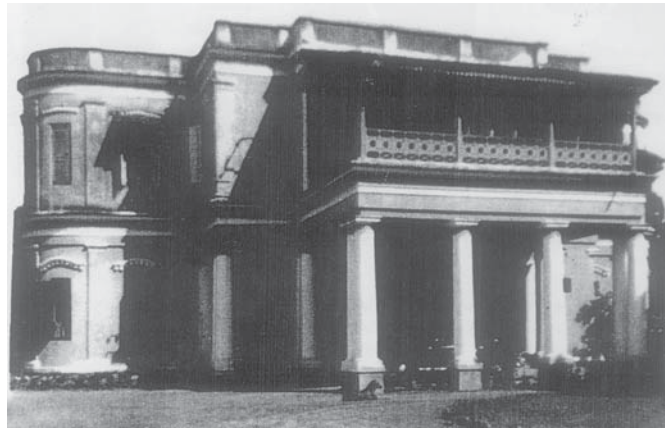
We met Peter Bush at the Airport and welcomed him in typical Indian style. From there we drove him in a V.I.P. Buick Open Tourer with the Round Table Pennant flying, followed by a convoy of a dozen cars to *Hadley*, the home of John D Barton, the first President of the Round Table, Madras, and the temporary headquarters of R.T., India.

Sunday morning we sent Peter Bush off on a tour of Madras with our Vice-Chairman and a couple of Tablers, while Ethiraj (P.N. Ethiraj of Harrison's), now dubbed 'The Last Straw' for reasons rather too involved to go into here, and I went off to make an inspection of the Charter site and arrangements.

Our Square Peg Prasad Reddi had arranged the use of his father's beautiful 25-acre garden for this event and also loaned their private cinema open-sided hall for the showing of our 'Film Project'. The weather being rather inclement we decided to have dinner set under the protective cover of this rather massive pavilion, the repast being supplied by Tabler Ethiraj through his catering division, 'Harrisons'.

Sunday evening's pro-

gramme consisted of a visit to Prasad's large and very up-to-date printing press, which is always a joy to see since one could eat one's meal off any of the machines and even off the floor, the only objection to so doing being that one would mess up the place with the food, then a quick look round the 60 acres of film studio, with its 13 shooting floors, 8 preview cinema halls and sound sets, airconditioned canteens,



Hadley – once the headquarters of R.T., India.

airconditioned laboratory and scenery workshop, all this set amidst well-laid wide carriage-ways and beautiful lawns and gardens, in fact a veritable fairy land, the like of which I don't think can be found anywhere else.

Having seen one or two sets and a couple of films in the making we proceeded to the Gardens to dine and receive from Peter the Charter, besides a Gavel and Block, the Aims and Objects and a number of Banners.

We had decided to show Pe-

ter the famous Mahabalipuram on Monday morning before having lunch with Ethi at the Cricket Club. It so happened that having, after the inauguration, sat through the Table Film Project – a Tamil film cut from 20,000 feet to 8,500, with an English commentary telling the story – we decided to take Peter, now a licensed 'drinker', for a 'stronger' drink at the Gymkhana Club. We understand he took his permit home

to frame and hang with his other qualifications in his surgery; it would no doubt have impressed his patients no end! Having refreshed ourselves we were wending our way homeward when it was decided that, since it was already Monday morning, even if only 2 a.m., we might as well get the next item on the programme over and take Peter forthwith to Mahabalipuram, especially as a Full Moon shone fitfully above.

The details are too involved to explain here but, on this rather unusual escapade, Peter

was encouched in the back of the car with two females, one on each shoulder. It would not be fair to publicise their names, suffice it to say that one slept all the way there and, when woken up at our destination, peevishly complained that we had woken her up instead of letting her sleep until we got home. It took some time for her to appreciate that we were actually at Mahabalipuram and not at *Hadley*.

On this trip, we made history by showing a V.I.P. this intriguing historical ruin by 'candlelight' – or was it 'torchlight'? The whole thing was actually very pleasant since the road was clear all the 37 miles and we were able to step over the slumbering forms of numerous unofficial guides and beggars who normally afflict visitors during the regular visiting hours.

Not a soul stirred anywhere and, apart from the bats, who flew alarmed from the ceilings of the various temples visited, we saw no living, or perhaps I should say waking, soul. The whole thing was very impressive and pleasant and much more enjoyable than a daytime visit with all its hazards of traffic,



John D Barton.

heat, guides and beggars, not to speak of hundreds of other visitors. It is to be recommended to anyone wishing to see the place at its best, to do so by 'candlelight'.

Ethi, with exceptional stamina, drove all the way back to Madras, the two damsels sleeping fitfully again, me dozing in front, and poor Peter struggling to keep awake for fear Ethi would be lulled into peaceful slumber at 60 m.p.h.

To bed at 5 a.m. and up again at 9 a.m. breakfast and a shopping expedition. Peter fit and full of beans and yours truly staggering a round. Lunch at the Cricket Club with Ethi looking a bit worn out playing host, assisted by his wife Teena, to about 80 guests. Then it was back to *Hadley* to pack and head for the Airport to catch the 5 p.m. plane to Bombay.

## Answers to Quiz

1. Daan van Bunge of Holland; 2. Geo TV; 3. Joaquim Carvalho; 4. Justice A.R Lakshmanan; 5. Dhanush; 6. Wangari Muta Maathai; 7. Elton John; 8. Tuberculosis (TB); 9. Baghdad.

\* \* \*

10. Kimi Raikkonen; 11. Mani Shankar Aiyar; 12. Sri Parimala Ranganatha Perumal; 13. Rajendra I; 14. Tranquebar; 15. Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle; 16. R. Sathya Bama; 17. Namakkal; 18. Called 'Singaravelar Maligai', it is named after M. Singaravelar, the first advocate from the fisherman community; 19. Dr. Radhakrishnan Nagar; 20. Vijayakanth.

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