

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

MADRAS MUSINGS

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March 16-31, 2008

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Would they fine us for not generating waste, too?

The ides of April

News: "Immediate fines for littering, garbage dumping (including unsystematic disposal) from April 1, 2008."

You: Great. Watch out, all you paan-spitting, litter-bugging types, because ...

Voice-from-the-Crowd: Hoy!

You (slightly taken aback): Yes?

VFTC: Are you being funny about something as serious as garbage disposal?

You: Er...no...

VFTC: And waste segregation?

You (nervously): Of course not. I'm registering support, in my own, possibly totty-headed way, for the cause and...

VFTC: Why specifically mention 'paan-spitting'? That's sheer social bias. And why are you hopping about?

You: Not hopping. Reeling.

With shock. All I meant was...

VFTC: You think paan-spitting and garbage-dumping are confined only to some social categories?

You (mopping your forehead):

No, no, paan-spitting, garbage-throwing, ignoring recycling and bio-degradable (or non) aspects... offenders are everywhere, regardless of sex, income, education, appearance, hair-type, taste in music... whatever.

VFTC (raising voice): Prejudice-ist. Inappropriate-funny-sider. There's a menacing rush towards you.

Choosing to be even feebly funny for a career sometimes requires you to be fleet of foot. You take off for the open, displaying impressive speed.

But, dutiful to the last, you yell out: "April 1st... remember, April 1st. You have till then to study and categorise your garbage".

You almost chuck your speech notes, then hastily stuff them into your bag.

Every little gesture counts, for a responsibly clean environment.

Ranjitha Ashok

When will IT Expressway keep its promises?

(By A Special Correspondent)

The Highways Secretary, Government of Tamil Nadu, has in a recent meeting announced that the work on the high profile IT Expressway (now renamed Rajiv Gandhi Salai) will be completed by March 31st. He has also stated that the main carriageway of the first phase from Madhya Kailash to Siruseri, spanning 20.1 km, and the ECR Link Road, connecting Sholinganallur and Akkari (2.1 km), would be ready by March. The service roads are expected to be completed by August. It has been decided to build link bridges from the MRTS stations that are on the same route. The toll plaza will be complete by April and will be operational from July. The reality on ground, however, appears to indicate that it is doubtful if any of this will be completed to the satisfaction of road-users.

A drive down the corridor shows that almost all is well on the stretch from Madhya Kailash to Tidel Park. But from Kandanchavadi and Perungudi onwards, it is clear that work

(Continued on page 7)



The Expressway to be completed by March 31, 2008!



Ours is world's eighth densest metro

(By A Staff Reporter)

The US-based *Forbes* magazine has, in its recent survey, listed Chennai among the densest cities of the world. The city ranks 8th in the list. Delhi is in 13th position and Bangalore is 19th. The magazine has commented that "Living in a dense place affects the quality of living, unless you have loads of money and the place is gentrified like Tokyo and New York. Dense is, however, a relative term. A Mumbai native visiting New York is bound to feel like a New Yorker vacationing on a Wyoming dude ranch." The magazine has blamed "fast-track economic growth" for the density of population in metros. It is significant that the list of

the top ten densest metros of the world has three Indian cities - Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai.

Citizens of Chennai may take solace in the fact that the list of the top 25 dirtiest cities of the world does not include the metro, while it does have Mumbai (7th) and Delhi (24th). But while Chennai appears to have escaped, neighbouring Ranipet has not. It comes in for special mention and it is stated that "Ranipet's pollution can affect up to 3 million people, as it is upstream from populous Chennai. Its tannery waste amounted to 1,500,000 tons a year of toxic material. There is

contamination of ground and water. There are efforts being made at containment."

While *Forbes* magazine's penchant for listing just about anything (10 hardest drinking cities of the world, is an example) may have resulted in the "dirty" statistics going unnoticed, last year's Worldwide Quality of Living Survey by Mercer Human Resource Consulting showed Indian cities in a very poor light as well. That study stated that Indian cities score relatively poorly on health and sanitation counts, with scores ranging from 52.8 for Chennai (position 177) to 38.2 for Mumbai (position 209).

Most Indian cities are densely populated and have poor waste removal and sewage systems. These issues, combined with increasing air pollution, contribute to their relatively low ratings, according to the study. It highlighted the fact that there is a very real risk of transmission of diseases in these cities owing to the poor ratings.

Given this scenario, the Central Government has come up with the idea of satellite townships for 35 cities in the country. For all cities having populations exceeding a million - and naturally Chennai is one - the Ministry for Urban Development is finalising a "satellite

(Continued on page 7)

**OUR
READERS
WRITE**



Causing congestion

The State Government had some time ago announced that during the last 18 months ten new industrial projects, involving an investment of Rs.15,000 crore, had been finalised in Tamil Nadu. The government has also just announced finalisation of five more new mega projects involving Rs.16,000 crore. These fifteen new projects are to be located around Chennai, to generate new employment opportunities for over two lakhs of people.

Government should consider locating a few of the new proposed projects in the hinterland and southern districts, to enable development of the different regions of the State and to generate employment opportunities in the districts also. This will reduce regional disparities in the State as required in the new industrial policy of the State announced recently. This will also ease the growing congestion in Chennai and suburbs.

J.W. Thomas
9, Ritherdon Road
Chennai 600 007

Lasting solution

Flyovers (MM, December 16th) may not be the panacea for all traffic evils, but they certainly help. Can anyone imagine Gemini Circle without the flyover? However, the lasting solution lies in the development of satellite suburbs (if not cities), complete with all the urban paraphernalia. Unfortunately, such proposals get stalled in the name of protecting farmers.

C.G. Prasad
9, C.S. Mudali Street
Kondithope
Chennai 600 079

Surrogate mother

Dr. K.N. Kesari (MM, March 1st) passed on to his daughter Sarada Devi his wonderfully humane qualities. She was quiet and self-effacing and her kind nature endeared her to all who knew her. When I came from England in 1962 to be married to her sister's brother-in-law, Sarada eduthi, as I addressed her, became my surrogate mother. She comforted me when I was homesick, found the perfect remedy for continuous sickness in my pregnancy, opened her home to my children during summer holidays so that they might play with their cousins, allowing them to explore the hidden corners of Kesari Kuteeram, a delight my daughter talks of even today, told me stories from the

Ramayana and *Mahabharata*. I became a rather unlikely member of her family and was never made to feel anything different.

As unusual and enlightened in his time as Dr. Kesari was, so, too, was his daughter Sarada Devi. The family is blessed to share their genes. I am very proud of Vasantha eduthi's skills in translating Dr. Kesari's memoirs. They are a gem.

Radha Gopalakrishnan
26/2, Arundale Beach Road
Kalakshetra Colony
Chennai 600 090

A tram experience

Reader Sethuraman's letter on trams (MM, December 16th) reminded me of my visit to Melbourne in 2005. It was a joy, the modern trams in Melbourne. The city centre had a free tram service, a great boon to tourists, as it went on a rectangular route, making shopping so comfortable. Other tram routes in the city were not free, but senior citizens had to pay much less. As a senior citizen, the Melbourne Museum let me in free! My grey hair was good enough for verification!

K.V.S. Krishna
2A, Parkland Apartments
Kamalabhai Street, T. Nagar
Chennai 600 017

The stage 'Avvai'

The article on Avvai Shanmugam (MM, February 16th) kindled nostalgic memories. About 60 years ago, I had the opportunity and pleasure of attending the play *Avvaiyar*, enacted by the troupe of TKS Brothers in Coimbatore. Donning a woman's garb, T.K. Shanmugam portrayed the legendary poet with amazing perfection. It was thereafter that the title 'Avvai' was prefixed to his name like 'Nawab' before the name of Rajamanickam for his role in *Bhaktha Ramdas*.

In the 1930s, as a school boy, I had attended all the dramas of the TKS groups whenever they played at Tirupur, my hometown. Whether the themes were Puranic or social-based, every drama of theirs with Shanmugam as hero and Bhagavathi as villain was interesting.

It was at Tirupur they enrolled a woman artiste, M.S. Draupathi, for the first time in their troupe. It was also Tirupur-based Jupiter Pictures which gave all the four TKS brothers suitable roles in their film *Menaka*, the first ever Tamil social film.

He was a true Gandhian, a lover and patron of Tamil literature, arts and music.

M.K. Pillai
110, Rupa Nagar
Coimbatore 600 045

Birthday bashes the Chennai way

Recently, both our leading political parties celebrated the birthdays of their leaders. And what events they proved to be. Almost took *The Man from Madras Musings* to the days of the Maharajahs and Maharanis of yore. MMM had no choice. He was literally caught in the thick of the festivities.

For one leader, the celebrations included a health camp for the poor. The venue was a Community Hall close to where MMM has his humble abode. Obviously, the harmful effects of prolonged exposure to high decibels of sound did not come under the purview of this health camp, for loudspeakers were installed at various places and film-songs were played non-stop and at deafening volumes all through the event. The blood pressure data

seemed to think that this was an indication of their leader having become an international authority. Two toughs who conversed even as they relieved themselves against MMM's compound wall claimed that even "Glindon" (wonder which one, Bill or Hill?) took the leader's advice. The procession moved on at its own sweet will and took more than three hours to complete the route of a kilometre or so.

Across the road from where MMM lives came up a digital banner praising the leader to the high heavens. The personage was compared to several mythical personages and also hailed as the leader of the past, present and future. The scaffolding to support this banner... But we went into all that before, didn't we?

tumbled out, leaving the *pongal* to hold fort even as the sandwich looked on in grim satisfaction. Even this was not spared. By the simple expedient of not providing a knife, the butter was not usable. Cleverly, the knife was provided to some and not others, so that there would be no mutiny by the passengers en masse. MMM has been told that it is not so, but he still thinks that the withholding of the knife is done by a computer programme that selects at random the passengers to be deprived of this implement.

In the evening journey, considerable savings have been effected by ensuring that coffee is 99% hot water with some murky powder added. Then the 7.00 p.m. bun, which accompanies the soup, again has butter provided sans knife. The net result? So many butter packs

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

of those living in the vicinity would have made for some interesting reading. No amount of appeal to reduce the volume had any effect.

Across the road from where MMM lives came up a digital banner praising the leader to the high heavens. The personage was compared to several mythical personages and also hailed as the leader of the past, present and future. The scaffolding to support this banner blocked the narrow pedestrian pavement and those who dared walk had to do so at their own risk. Tube-lights were erected all along a kind of ceremonial pathway, electricity supply for which being drawn from the mains of the street.

Then came a few days' reprieve. The loudspeakers were removed. The tube-lights went into hibernation and the digital banner too went no doubt to perform duty as a roof-top in some slum. The scaffolding remained. And then came the birthday of the other leader, who belonged to the rival party.

This celebration involved a procession of the party faithfuls to the accompaniment of percussion instruments from various states. The procession, naturally enough, had to be held at peak traffic hour in the morning. MMM, whose brief is to gaze upon the world and make notes, stayed in his balcony and watched the proceedings, at grave risk to his hearing (the Chief will please note this and appreciate the risks MMM takes). What amazed MMM was a group of foreigners, all carrying sequined garlands for the leader. Why this group was in the procession is something that MMM is yet to figure out, but party cadres

Railway profits

The Man from Madras Musings, despite his high sounding title, is a small fellow. His outlook is all on the micro and he rarely understands things such as budgets, both railway and 'general', filled as they are with terms that go completely over his head. All he knows is that, post budget, prices will go up and he must tighten his belt some more. Hopefully, the time will not come when MMM can comfortably tie his watch strap around his waist. But this time, given the Railways' stupendous performance, MMM has, based on his own travelling experiences by the Shatabdi Express, come to the conclusion that it is entirely due to cost cutting measures and not due to any increase in freight that the Railways have posted a profit.

The Railways have done this in several subtle ways. The first method has been to reduce catering costs and also take care of passengers' health. This win-win step involved a gradual reduction in the quantity of the breakfast served to them. In the early days, this meal was a virtual feast, with passengers barely able to get off the train and walk up the over-bridge at Bangalore station. This involved a sandwich, *idli*, *vada* and *pongal*. The *idli* in the initial spacious times was what those in Delhi would have called a 'healdhee' *idli*, so round and plump it was and so white its complexion.

Then the *idli* was put on a diet and it slowly shrank and, one day, vanished. The *vada*, mourning for its lost companion, began pining away and, soon, like Jill following Jack,

saved. MMM rather hesitantly asked for a knife, only to be looked down upon by the haughty bearer. Others, not so intrepid, were seen tearing chunks of the bun and swiping it on the butter. Also, with the dinner, which is usually North Indian, comes *sambar*, which is clearly recycled from the morning breakfast leftover. This saves the cost of providing dhal! And, of late, tissue papers are also not provided. Perhaps it is with a view to save paper. But MMM does not think so. It all goes, according to MMM, in saving money for the Railways.

The kiss of joy

The Man from Madras Musings was at the Bangalore airport when the slog overs of the cricket match at Gabba were being played. MMM found himself cheering and clapping, but not to the extent of a stout gentleman who was clearly the cheerleader. His flight had been announced, but he refused to budge stating that he would wait till India had won and, sure enough, India won. Then the unexpected happened. The stout gent, after having jumped, danced, waved his arms and yelled, still had surplus energy which had to be spent. He found MMM standing next to him and enveloped him in a bear hug. Not content with that, he planted two kisses on MMM's cheeks before he was led away by an irate airline attendant. MMM is yet to live this down; as for the gaze of the surrounding passengers, the less said the better. MMM is seriously thinking of growing a beard as deterrent.

— MMM

National Trusts team together

– Launch umbrella organisation

The 12th International Conference of National Trusts (ICNT) was formally inaugurated by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in New Delhi in December. On the eve of the Conference, the International National Trusts Organisation (INTO) was formally launched.

Simon Molesworth, Chairman of the Steering Committee, stated that a decision had been taken at the 11th ICNT to forge a common platform of National Trusts to strengthen the network of non-government advocates for heritage conservation. INTO, the result, could speak jointly and boldly to the leaders of the world about threats to mankind's collective legacy. The parties to the INTO Charter agreed to establish a cohesive framework, a non-governmental, non-profit, non-stock, charitable, educational and membership organisation to promote conservation and enhancement of cultural and natural heritage of all nations for the benefit of people worldwide through public involvement.

Speaking at the INTO launch, the Vice President of India, M.H. Ansari, stated that special attention needed to be given to heritage conservation in areas affected by conflict and natural disasters and to ensure that adequate steps are taken to

mitigate the negative impact of tourism on the culture of communities.

At present, INTO has a total of 10 committee members – they are representatives from Australia, Bermuda, Canada, India, Malta, Netherlands, Scotland, Slovakia, UK and USA. One of them said, "If conservation is to succeed, it must move beyond a narrow focus to deal with broader issues such as poverty alleviation. The conservation of heritage and culture of people across the world is an important global issue today, an issue which embraces equally our natural heritage, our built heritage and its art forms, along with the traditional knowledge systems like folklore, music and dance".

The launch of INTO concluded with the adoption of its Charter signed by 53 countries. INTO's objective is to influence heritage conservation policy, national in terms of geographical remittance, but global in strength. Having learned from each other about sustainability and partnership, INTO will be primarily committed to public education and heritage awareness. It will engage in cultural and natural heritage conservation at a practical management level.

The Prime Minister, inaugurating ICNT-2007, stressed the importance of a mindset that

respects value systems and a culture that learns from the past. "Unless we respect our inheritance, unless we are prepared to learn from it, we will not invest in its preservation," he stated. He candidly admitted that while India was conscious of the need to preserve, protect and promote its cultural heritage, "we have not always succeeded in doing so." He pointed out that to assume we need only resources is not enough because "conservation should not be seen as an 'elitist' preoccupation. It must make itself meaningful to society in a manner that engenders community participation on a large scale. To be effective, conservation efforts need to be coordinated with a comprehensive planning policy through preparation of local area plans and participation of the resident community."

Dr. Karan Singh, the keynote speaker at the valedictory function, said young people should grow up with a knowledge of and deep feelings for their heritage and this must be nurtured in the national interest.

The conference was organised by INTACH, a major stakeholder in INTO and its future activities. (Courtesy: *Virasat*, The journal of INTACH.)

Thus they spoke...

Participants in the 12th International Conference of National Trusts had many things to say. Here are some significant quotes:

"Many years ago, Jawaharlal Nehru was faced in Parliament with a demand that a programme of fellowships for artists and scholars be abolished. We were engaged in military conflict with one of our neighbours, and the distinguished parliamentarians were arguing that scholarship funds could be better utilised for defence purposes. Pandit Nehru listened carefully and acknowledged that the logic was sound. "But then, gentlemen," he is reported to have added, "What are we fighting for?" These things are worth fighting for – the beauties of our natural environment, the monuments that have been left to us in trust by generations past, and the integrity of all the manifestations of our living cultures that have brought us together here."

S.K. MISRA
Chairman, INTACH

* * *

"Let us bring nature and culture INTO the future."

Prof. MYUNG-RAE CHO,
Trustee, National Trust of Korea

* * *

"Change is inevitable – but we must ask ourselves: Is change also desirable?"

SHYAM CHAINANI, Chairman,
Bombay Environmental Action Group

* * *

"Heritage conservation is rehabilitation of memories and creating experience. It is shared value for all."

Prof. ALEXANDER P. KUDRYAVTSEV,
President, Russian Academy of Architecture &
Construction Sciences, Moscow

* * *

"Broadening the base of heritage consciousness should get prioritised."

HASMUKH SHAH
Vice Chairman, INTACH

* * *

"In business, the motive is profit, in the case of heritage it is education or the enjoyment that it can provide. Having got the answer to these basic questions... there will have to be a proper strategy for managing heritage."

DR. O.P. AGRAWAL
Director General, ICCI, INTACH

* * *

"The Government launched the National Lottery in 1994 which would give money to good causes... all of which must be for the public good... the Heritage Lottery Fund has generated £4 million for heritage, which has been awarded to over 26,000 projects throughout the U.K."

JUDITH CLIGMAN
Director, Policy & Research, HLF, UK

Our Addresses

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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 post-card space, making reading or editing impossible.

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

– THE EDITOR

CHENNAI HERITAGE

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An ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION of just Rs.100 covers only a part of our costs. Corporate support and YOUR support will continue to be essential for Chennai Heritage and *Madras Musings* to play a greater role in creating awareness about the city, its heritage and its environment. We therefore look forward to your sending us your contributions IN ADDITION TO your subscriptions.

If in the coming year Chennai Heritage receives repeated support from those of you who have already made contributions, and if many more supporters join the bandwagon, we will not only be able to keep *Madras Musings* going, but also be able to continue awareness-building exercises on on-going projects as well as undertake one or two more such exercises.

Therefore, please keep your contributions coming IN ADDITION TO YOUR SUBSCRIPTIONS. If, say, you send in a cheque for Rs.500, we will treat Rs.100 of it towards subscription to *Madras Musings* for 2007-08 and the remaining Rs.400 as contribution towards the causes Chennai Heritage espouses.

We look forward to all readers of *Madras Musings*, and those newcomers who want to receive copies, sending in their subscriptions. We are indeed sorry we can no longer remain a free mailer.

– The Editor

Madras in the 1890s

(Continued from last fortnight)

In the last issue of *Madras Musings*, we carried extracts relevant to Madras from the reminiscences of Dr. K.N. Kesari, a well-known Ayurvedic physician of Madras. These were penned in 1953 and pertain to the period spanning 1890 to 1950. We offer readers a few more extracts about Madras in the 1890s.

Catering to the Andhras

In those days there were no hostels for college students. Andhra people disliked having food in Tamil hotels. So Andhras took a room for rent and had food in some houses and paid for it. In Tankasala (Mint) Street, Kasi 'Paatti' used to make chutneys in a hostel. But Tamilians and Andhras always had disputes and, so, finally Telugu people were not allowed to have food in that hostel.

Then one Andhra lady started a hotel and started cooking Andhra dishes. The hotel charges were Rs 7 to Rs. 10. The lady got Rs.10 from the people, but since she had to provide them with costly food varieties like chutneys, *avakkai*, plenty of ghee, she found it hard to meet the growing expenses. Ultimately she had to close the hotel.

There were no good coffee houses. Coffee was served outside the veranda of small houses. Brahmins were served inside. The coffee had no taste or flavour and was poured in dirty tumblers as well. *Vadas*, *dosais*, *murukku*, *puliotharai*, curd rice, *thair vadai* were served on leaves. Once, while passing through Kothwalchavdi, I stepped into a coffee hotel to have *Thiruppannamam*. Thinking it to be a special tiffin I ordered it. I was given something oily and not being able to withstand its bad taste, I had to throw it away. These "Clubs" were run by *Vaishnavas*.

Kanyaka Parameswari temple

Poor feeding for Brahmin boys was conducted at the Kanyaka Parameswari temple. Vaisyas had great respect for Brahmins and so plenty of Brahmins were given food during festival season. Almost 2000 Brahmins were fed daily for nine days. The brinjal curry and *rasam* were very famous and were cooked by expert cooks like Buna Kutumbayya garu, Mulukutla Subbayya, Jalayya and Appayya. For nine days they were paid Rs. 1116.

Even rich people had food there on some days. Food was brought to the houses of those who were unable to attend.

On Vijayadasami Day, the deity was decorated with diamond ornaments and brought out in procession. Usually, it was taken along Varada Muthiappan Street where many Muslims resided. Once, a number of Muslims tried to create trouble. The temple authorities, to be on the safe side, had already arranged police protection. Among the policemen, Weldon was famous and he with three other sergeants was proceeding on horseback. Walking along with the deity were Kolla Kannayya Chetty and other temple trustees, temple workers, Pundit Gopalacharyulu and I.

It was 10 o'clock in the night when stones were thrown. Weldon was hurt. He tied his head with a cloth and ran to bring the constables. After their

stones and took them out to get more money!

There was a gang of lazy, idle people, particularly mischief-makers, orphans and those who had been driven out of their houses. They would go to places of marriages and other functions and would fill their stomachs with the leftovers. They used to also shout out for money. At nights, they slept at the doors of shops or houses. Komatti people were afraid (of thefts) and they used to ask these people to sleep outside to guard their houses and they used to pay (these people) for their services. For wedding processions, they would accompany the party carrying the lights. They were also given money to attack enemies. They took ganja instead of liquor. There were even women amongst these people. After the First World War, these people were no longer to be seen.

Beggars were of different types. Some performed dance, others made dolls to dance, some dressed in female dresses. Likewise, eunuchs also dressed like women and people found their shows quite amusing. Some also performed magic shows. Some from Andhra would wield sticks

Reminiscences of Dr. K. N. Kesari - II

arrival they blocked the two entrances. The assailants were unsuccessful and the deity reached the temple safely. The police arrested all the miscreants who were hiding in various places and the trial in the High Court went on for a long time. Kannayya Chetty was helpful in arresting many people.

The services in Madras

Old Chetty people, Nayudus and Mudaliars wore turbans. The turbans were long and broad and were in different colours. There were three people to tie this on one head and they were given 1 or 2 annas.

In George Town, a fat dark man by name Ramdas used to give baths to others. He would give a clean bath chanting the *kirtanas* of Ramdas (Bhadra-chala) and his charges were only four annas. His services were, however, not available for everyone.

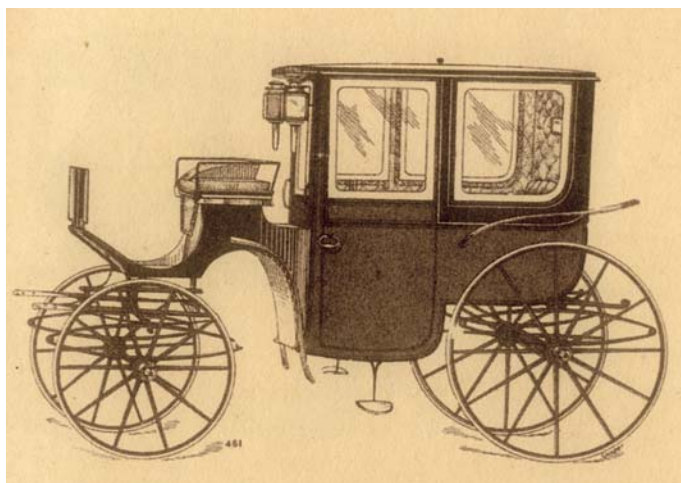
Another set of people was engaged in cleaning and removing waste from the ears. With cotton and medicines, these people used to wander about the streets to do their job. They would even take out stones from people's ears and increase their charges for doing so. It was said that these people themselves used to first insert the

and knives and beg. One man used to carry a bell and go on ringing it. Another sang funny songs while begging.

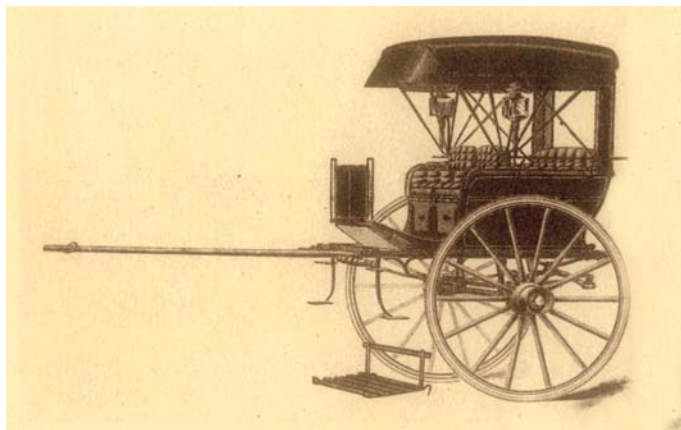
There were people to carry dead bodies and they formed their own group. The man who conducted the final obsequies would bring a group of people to carry the dead body. The rate would be according to the financial position (of the dead person) and was also dependent on the weight of the dead person. Thus, the man in charge would also get a commission.

Transport in Madras

In those days horse driven carts were in vogue. And they were not at all comfortable. They were converted into 'Velur Jutkas'. Besides these, there were also bullock carts. 'Rekla' cart is still in use. It has two wheels. There is a seat, and children can sit leaning on the back of the driver. It is light in weight and can pick up great speed. Races are held once in a while with these 'Rekla' carts. Three-wheeled carts were also there. Middleclass people owned these. Rich people, besides horse-drawn carts, used these three-wheeled carts for short rides to the market etc. The front wheel was run by the man driving the cart. At



Above: A variation of a closed landau... Below: A cabriolette on cee springs... both by Simpson's of Madras.



the back, one or two persons pushed it.

There was a dress etiquette followed while out riding. Rich men wore gold chains around their wrists. To display these, they wore shirts with short sleeves. Aram Ponneri village was famous for dry washing of clothes. They washed the then famous dhotis with chocolate borders very well. I recall how in those days, Telugu Nayudus and Chettys used to wear these dhotis, with gold chains on their hands, short sleeve shirts and *Srichurnam* on their foreheads, riding in the 'Rekla' carts.

Then came the 'Madras Coach', the 'Brougham' and, still later, the 'Bombay coach', the horse carts by name Phaeton, Landau, Landulet and Dakart with 2 and 4 wheels. Soon after came the trams and the motorcars. I bought at first a 'Madras coach', then a 'Bombay coach', thereafter a Phaeton, Landulet and Landau. I also used a Velur Jutka and a cart drawn by two horses. I bought Australian horses and (later) sold them for a good price.

Civic amenities

The roads were not smooth; there were many ups and downs. There were no proper gutters to drain out the dirty water. Rainwater which collected on roads had no way of draining out, except to dry in the sun. Once in a way, the municipality took necessary steps to let out the dirty water by making gutters in the middle of the roads and covering them.

During the rainy season, water overflowed and the roads were filled with knee-deep water. No dustbins were placed in the roads. The municipality staff used to remove the dirt and the dust in a vehicle. Even human excrement was carried in this way making the whole route dirty.

Roads were lit by kerosene lamps. Those who were entrusted with this job took some portion of the kerosene and so the lights burnt only for a short time and the city became dark soon. Till 1910, gaslights were used. Electricity came thereafter.

There are sixteen lakh people in Madras now. From 1949, the Corporation supplies only 160 lakh gallons of water daily, which means 10 gallons per head or 2½ kerosene tins. Water problem is not new (in Madras). It was always there. Water was sold at two annas a pot in Peddannaikkanpeta.

In 1720, due to scarcity of water cholera broke out. Then in 1772, pure water supply scheme was begun. Well water, after storing in tanks, was purified and was sent through pipes to military men. Water was always available in the Seven Wells area. When there was no piped water, water was supplied from seven wells and that street came to be known as Seven Wells Street. Only thereafter supply from the Red Hills tank started. When cyclone and heavy rains damaged several machines in Red Hills, well water was supplied for ten days. Water supply through pipe connection was given to houses during 1783-87.

Is the loom song fading?

Weaving – a metaphor for creation.

Across the world, diverse cultures acknowledge its magical, mystical essence through their myths, legends and folklore.

India's rich and ancient textile tradition, even today, shares a very special link with religion and philosophy. A passage from Sabita Radhakrishna's forthcoming book on textiles says that the *Rig Veda* and the *Upanishads* refer to the ordered universe as an infinite cosmic fabric woven by the Gods, its warp and weft forming a grid pattern displaying life, in all its illusions and endless cycles.

Sabita Radhakrishna's play *Song of the Loom*, dedicated to the human face of this age-old craft, was born out of her awareness of the harsh circumstances that beset the lives of weavers in South India. The play is being staged on March 21st in Chennai.

Sabita, well-known in Chennai as a fashion and textile designer, fashion show choreographer, freelance writer, television programme presenter, recipient of the Gourmand World Award for the Best Indian Cookbook for 2002, and active executive committee member of the Crafts Council of India, has involvements with the world of textiles since 1977.

As proprietor of the city's first-of-its-kind boutique, the very successful 'Amrapali', Sabita created unique sarees, sourcing material from all over the South, giving them a different identity. "I've always loved the feel of Indian handlooms. After a while, I thought, 'Why not get different

Thinking that pipe water was impure, Hindus used only well water.

Those who did not have wells at home had their bath and got their clothes washed in temple tanks. They brought this water home for drinking purposes. The water in those tanks was so dirty with weeds that the then executive engineer Standish described it as follows:

"I have not seen such dirty water so far except in the temple tanks. In Kapaleeswarar Temple the water in the tank is so dirty that I have not seen so much decayed water even in gutters. Even then, people use that water."

To meet the needs (of the population) and to purify the water, the Government took steps from 1861. Red Hills water and Cholavaram scheme came into being after 1866. Water was stored from these sources in

(Continued on page 8)

working conditions, the flood of synthetic fabrics, migrations from rural to urban areas, and failure to locate and adapt to new market needs. She speaks, among other instances, of Benares, which saw suicides, because of Chinese imitations flooding the market.

Pit looms are hard to work with; arthritis and severe eye problems are rampant, while alcohol abuse is not unknown. Some handloom weavers have turned to power-looms. Others have chosen construction-work and brickmaking as employment options. There have been instances where children have been sold into bonded labour, with very little hope of release. Even older weavers have been forced into other jobs, allowing traditional skills to dwindle and die. Weaving handlooms follows closely behind agriculture as a source of livelihood, and adversities in the farming sector impact the weavers.

Kancheepuram, Salem, Rasi-puram with its "gorgeous borders", Madurai and Coimbatore... there are many areas closely identified with weaving through the State, but cotton weaving is under threat in all of them, says Sabita.

Theorising about idealism is a luxury. "I too have been an idealist, and it has pained me to see the weavers suffer. This pain is reflected in my play."

Sabita strongly believes that craft activists must understand, and accept, that help and support must be realistically given, keeping the weavers' familiar and comfort zones in mind. If sympathy translates into accepting poor work, there is very real danger of an entire art-form being spoon-fed into complacency and lack of drive and motivation. That will ultimately bring about extinction, not sustenance.

"I am not against co-operatives. But, the weavers tell me: 'Amma, all of you come in your cars, and 'do' all this, but once a project is over... finished, you forget about us.'"

Yes, she acknowledges, there is support. Governments, NGOs and institutions like the All India Handicrafts Board do much to help weavers and other craftspeople. Opportunities for focussed work, training, new designs and new markets are all offered. But the weavers sometimes express a very real fear that schemes are forsaken, leaving them adrift. "We cannot take people to heights and abandon them there... that is dangerous and the basic attitudes, she points out with regret.

Today, she says, there is no longer any joy in weaving. When they were part of the royal ateliers, there was a sense of *bhakti*. Weaving was seen as something godly, with a philosophy, a sense of divinity, to it. The last few years, in particular, have seen drastic change and a shift in both the situation of the weavers and the basic attitudes, she points out with regret. She attributes this to poor



bureaucratic methods with too many delays are unhelpful. On the other hand, promises of stipends and upgraded looms do not always have the desired effect. "The weavers pointed to the samples of the low-cost saree and *dhoti* piles and wanted to know why we were trying to 'come and change them'." They naturally prefer an assured income, resisting efforts to push them towards more tiresome work, if there is no guarantee of sale at the other end. Is there a touch of demand that an art stays alive at someone else's cost?

There are no easy answers. How then do you, literally, bring all these 'threads' together?

"Weavers must deal with the customer directly; get a feel of

by
RANJITHA ASHOK

the market; what will, or won't, sell." Sabita feels. "This is where middlemen are a stumbling block. And, merely providing a platform for display is not enough. Help must take the form of loans, perhaps 'tide-over' money; at the same time allowing them to grow in self-sufficiency."

She offers the successful efforts of Sewa and of Judy Frater's Kala Raksha as very good working models. The weavers are taught marketing and contemporary trends. Traditional skills are applied to present needs, turning them into professional skills, bringing with them a sense of worth.

A holistic approach, empowering the entire weaving village, is required. No one advocates removal of basic hand skills; but they do need to become more efficient and productive.

Sartorial taste and usage has changed. But it is possible to bring weaving skills into contemporary usage. This would be a great way to rejuvenate the art

form, generate buyer interest, with cities supporting the weavers.

She warns: "The Kancheepuram *korvai* is in grave danger of becoming extinct. One weaver from Arni said: 'Your grandchildren will probably have to see traditional sarees only in museums.' This shattered me. I've visited weaving centres in Tamil Nadu. There was a time when they used to be so enthusiastic about every design we gave. Not any more."

Suicides, debt, changing social values and structures, the slow crumbling of spirit, the very real danger of a precious art slipping into oblivion – the images kept playing in her head, leading to the play. "I want to infuse everyone, not only craft activists and textile traditionalists, with the same passion, that sense of urgency, about this cause."

The media, films and plays like hers, she hopes, will strike a chord and help make people more sensitive to these issues.

Weaving has tremendous potential for employment, and does not require elaborate infrastructure and huge investments. Sabita wants the corporates to encourage employees to retain their traditional skills. "You can use them part-time and make it a condition that they devote some part of their lives to their traditional work," she suggests. Government agencies, given their standing and reach, can form panels, involving textile traditionalists in each city for advice on schemes.

Weavers are national treasures. They must re-discover pride in their art.

The solution lies with all of us, not just the powers-that-be. The next time you buy a handloom saree or material, look closely at the threads weaving in and out. Go beyond the colour and design, for, woven within the fabrics are human dreams, expectations, and destiny.

If you listen closely, you may even hear their song.

Quizzin'
with
Ram'nan

(Current Affairs questions are from the period February 16th to 29th. Questions 11 to 20 pertain to Chennai and Tamil Nadu.)

1. The decision of which electronic giant to withdraw from HD DVD production has ended the format war in Blu-ray Disc's favour?
2. Which country declared its independence from Serbia on February 17th?
3. Which iconic leader stepped down recently, 49 years after capturing power in an armed revolution?
4. Which famous activist has launched his fourth straight White House bid (ignoring his 1992 write-in campaign) as an Independent candidate?
5. Which film won the Best Picture and Best Director Oscar recently?
6. YouTube access was lost globally for hours on February 24th, owing to which Asian country's decision to block access domestically?
7. Which cyber giant was slapped with a record \$1.35 billion fine by the European antitrust regulator on February 27th?
8. Which Asian country has been chosen to host the first Summer Youth Olympic Games in 2010?
9. Name the record-breaking adventurer who was officially declared dead on February 16th, five months after he vanished while flying in a small plane. His second around-the-world balloon attempt ended in India.
10. Which two cricketers topped \$1 million in the recently concluded bids for the Indian Premier League?
* * *
11. After which World Heritage Site is TANFLORA's indigenous, deep-red rose, bred near Hosur, named? It is expected to boost exports manifold.
12. Which leading business group owns 'Chennai Super Kings'?
13. Who preceded C.N. Annadurai as the Chief Minister of Madras State?
14. On the banks of which river and in which town was Appar born?
15. What do the initials U.V. stand for in the name 'Thamizh Thatha' U.V. Swaminatha Iyer?
16. From whom did the English East India Company buy Fort St. David in Cuddalore in 1690?
17. In the demographics of the State, Adiyar, Malasar and Kurumans are all examples of what class of people?
18. Name the reservoir created by the Mettur Dam.
19. Where is the temple dedicated to Ketu among the Navagraha temples in the State?
20. Which actor is credited with playing the first double role in Tamil films?

(Answers on page 7)

• Forty years ago

A township that began with a dream

Sri Aurobindo had the dream of an inevitable Human Unity and the Mother had shared his dream of an ideal city: "There should be somewhere upon earth a place that no nation could claim as its sole property, a place where all human beings of goodwill, sincere in their aspiration, could live freely as citizens of the world, obeying one single authority, that of the supreme Truth; a place of peace, concord, harmony, where all the fighting instincts of man would be used exclusively to conquer the causes of his suffering and misery, to surmount his weakness and ignorance, to triumph over his limitations and incapacities; a place where the needs of the spirit and the care for progress would get precedence over the satisfaction of desires and passions, the seeking for pleasures and material enjoyments..." The day was February 28, 1968.

At 10.30 in the morning on a barren plateau, close to a lone

banyan tree, the youth of the world were invited to come and share in this dream and build a city that would become the cradle of a new Humanity. The Mother's organ music wafted across the devotees from the Ashram and peoples from around the globe who came to witness the start of a new age.

• by
CHANDRESH PATEL

The Charter of Auroville was read by the Mother in French. Thereafter, the ceremony of laying the symbolic earth in the lotus urn was commenced. The first ones to march forward were Kiran-di and Vijay bhai (Poddar). Kiran-di held the Mother's flag and Vijay bhai carried the symbolic earth from the Ashram. Vijay bhai deposited the symbolic earth and a scroll being the Charter of Auroville into the Urn.

One by one, youth from the



The Matri Mandir.

various states of India and the countries of the world marched two by two bearing the flag (with name placard) of the state or the country represented, and the symbolic earth. Many countries and states had sent their representatives for the ceremony. Where such representatives were not sent, youth from the Ashram substituted for the country or the state. After the reading of the Charter in French, the charter was read in other languages, Tamil, Sanskrit, English, Arabic, Chinese, Dutch, German, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Norwegian, Russian, Spanish, Swedish. As the Charter was read in Tamil, Sanskrit and English in the background, symbolic earth

was deposited in the Urn by youth representing each state of India in alphabetical order. Thereafter, during the reading of the Charter in Arabic, Chinese etc. (above listed languages) youth representing the various countries of the world (in alphabetical order) deposited symbolic earth in the Urn.

The city of Auroville is today at the threshold of a new age. Forty years in the making, the symbolic spiritual centre, the Matri Mandir, is now complete. The forests have been planted, water run-off bunded, small communities have taken deeper root, children have been going to school and now their children shout and play in the forests and grounds of Auroville. The first Aurovilians from around the villages have taken on a new role in the building of Auroville. Human challenges are now real and intense. The actuality of Human Unity seems a chimera. The difficulties abound. Many of the pioneers who came harkening to the first call left due to challenging governance issues. There are new forces, new faces, new energies and new impetus. Peoples are coming, many are returning. (Courtesy: Sri Aurobindo's Action)

Vale! it's designer

Just weeks before Auroville celebrated its 40th birthday, Roger Anger, its chief architect, passed away. Anger (24.3.1923 – 15.1.2008) will be remembered as an exceptional architect who belonged to the avant-garde trend that was emerging in Paris around mid-fifties.

At the age of 45, Roger Anger had already executed over 50 large-scale projects, and significantly contributed to modern architecture in France. A Paris guide to Modern Architecture cites seven of his projects. "Simple in conception but complex in treatment" is how his approach had been summarised in French architectural essays of the time. The most spectacular highlight of his work was *L'île Verte Grenoble*, then the highest inhabited residential building in Europe. It was awarded the Brussels Premier Prix International d' Architecture in 1967.

In 1966, he was appointed Chief Architect of Auroville. Together with Pierre Braslawski and Mario Heymann he developed a concept for the city on a barren, eroded land.

His early houses and schools demonstrated exemplary innovations at various levels. Architects and aspirants who were absorbed into Roger's office, earlier in Pondicherry and later in Auroville, recall the high concentration of creative energy and collective work in those early days when the excitement of this idealistic project was still fresh.

He produced proposals for other towns: Salem, Kudremukh, and Faridabad. His last project – Matri Mandir – was a highly complex building that could be practically hand-made, thanks to years of assistance from Jacqueline La Coste, his partner, Piero Cicionexi, and a collective effort of the residents.

Roger Anger, like many visionaries, faced a lot of struggle. Ever since the Mother left Her physical body, Auroville plunged into a struggle regarding collective organisation and decision-making; and Roger's role and authority were endlessly questioned by those residents who had comfortably settled into an organically growing settlement, originally intended and inaugurated as a planned city.

From 1978 to 1985 he had left Auroville, with a sense of hopelessness and paralysis, but reappeared when conditions seemed more favourable. Sadly, he didn't realise any further architectural project. All his energy was spent on creating conditions for the city to come.

His responsibility was to ensure the urban form of Auroville, and his last efforts revolved around the creation of a suitable governance structure that would promote the development of a city rather than a short-sighted one suited for the day-to-day activities of a handful of people. "I am trying to save what can still be saved", he had said. Roger Anger was a member of Auroville's Governing Board.

The aim of architecture was to manifest a high standard of beauty, he said. "Beauty had the power of uplifting the consciousness, spontaneously..."

For me, he was an intriguingly rare personality who could maintain the widest of vision and simultaneously pay attention to the smallest of details. A refined and heroic being, straightforward and courageous, who led a disciplined, balanced life, and rarely skipped his afternoon game of chess: "It's one game, where nothing can occur by chance, you create everything." (Courtesy: Sri Aurobindo's Action)

Anupama Kundoo

A big 'Thank You' to 7 of you

We publish below the list of donors who have, between 15.2.08 and 15.3.08, added to the support Chennai Heritage and its voice, *Madras Musings*, have already received. We thank all of them for their support for the causes Chennai Heritage espouses.

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Till March 20: An exhibition of paintings by R.B. Murari (at Artworld).

Till March 20: Regional Kala Mela 2008 (at Government Museum).

March 20: Sculptures in bronze, fibreglass and terracotta by T. Vijayvelu (at Artworld).

March 21: *Song of the Loom*, written by Sabita Radhakrishna and directed by T.T. Srinath and Indrani Krishnaier. The play talks of the plight of the master weavers in Tamil Nadu (at Sivagami Pethachi Auditorium).

March 21-30: Display of work of artist G. Madhavan (at Vinyasa Art Gallery).



March 22: Ugadi Celebrations with traditional folk dances, handicrafts and special cuisine (at DakshinaChitra).

March 22-April 5: *Birth Marks Series*, a solo exhibition of the work of Vidya Kamat (at Gallery Samukha).

March 26-29: A workshop with Georges Wolinksy, a French artist, who draws principally for the press. His work is seen in the daily newspaper *Libération*, the weekly *Paris Match*, *L'Echo des savanes* and *Charlie Hebdo* (at Alliance Francaise).



March 29: *Gayatri's Monologue* presented by Indianostre Theatre, written and directed by Koumarane V, translated by Cordis Paldano. An inquiry into the emotions of an actor and his or her relation with the personage. It is the tragedy of Gayatri. It is also the story of a

young boy and his encounter with theatre (at Alliance Francaise, 7 p.m.).

April 1-19: *Sapling Exhibition*, comprising 30 messages — photographs of tree saplings with captions that hope to inspire people across the world to plant trees and heal the earth. All tree saplings used in the campaign are native to India and an indicator of the trees that can be planted (at Alliance Francaise).

April 3: Concert by Trio à Vent, a wind trio that was formed from the quintet "A Vent...Propos", a well known chamber music ensemble from Lyon, with more than 200 performances to its credit since its inception in 1999. Fabien Bernoud (on the oboe), Richard Malblanc (on the clarinet) and Henri Roman (on the bassoon) explore a repertoire that focusses on the French music of the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th Century (at St. Andrew's Kirk, 6.30 p.m.).

April 5-20: *Indian Princes and Parisian Jewellers*, a photography exhibition that depicts jewellery designed by renowned houses in France for members of Indian Royalty belonging to the various princely states. There are also films that accompany the exhibition that will be screened in conjunction with the exhibition (at Government Museum).



April 20: *Pramil After Pramil*, a retrospective of poet Pramil's works. Pramil was the enfant-terrible of modern Tamil writing. Starting his life as a painter and sculptor, he later began to write New Poetry and literary criticism. He was given the Pudumai-Pitthan award in 1995.

To celebrate the beginning of his 70th birth anniversary, a series of events to commemorate this great poet, including photography and painting exhibitions on the poet, poetry reading sessions, book releases and also discussion on his life and work, are being organised (at Alliance Francaise).

When will IT Expressway keep its promises?

(Continued from page 1)

has happened only on the road surface proper and not on the surroundings. It will be remembered that when the IT Corridor was promised, it was depicted not merely as a road, but also as an experience, with sidewalks, cycle lanes, bus stops that are set off from the main road and a subterranean corridor for utilities. As of now, these have not made an appearance anywhere except in the initial stretch. In fact, the subsequent stretches do not appear to have any footpaths at all, thereby showing that this road is not going to be any different from the rest of Chennai's thoroughfares. Drainage pipes meant to be laid underground dot the roads and, in many places, the road surface itself is damaged thanks to continued use. In fact, in many stretches there is no blacktopping at all — and a nightmare drive is the consequence. Also, in many parts, the road appears to become a four-lane highway contrary to the six lanes promised earlier. However, this may be an optical illusion owing to heavy traffic and absence of lane markings. Judging from the number of shops and semi-permanent structures that still stand on both sides of the road, it would appear that the project's greatest bugbear — land acquisition — continues to plague it.

The Government has said that blacktopping was in progress from Karapakkam to the Sholinganallur junction (2.6 km), and from Sholinganallur to Siruseri (7.7 km). The main carriageway of the

ECR Link Road, it has also been stated, would be blacktopped by March-end. But users are asking if that is all that there is — if it indeed does happen — to what was once flaunted as a world-class highway.

The project, kickstarted in 2004, was estimated to cost Rs. 84.41 crore in the first phase, which included the cost of setting up toll plazas, supervision costs and contingencies. The core activities included conversion of the stretch into a six-lane carriageway with medians and road signs. The cost of land acquisition was not included and this was estimated to be Rs. 43 crore. There was great delay in land acquisition and still greater delay in shifting the utilities. The contractor had difficulty in mobilising resources which resulted in stretching of the timeline. Acquisition of litigation-free land was the first hurdle and resulted in the commencement of the project being shifted to 1st January 2005. The problems of over 120 linking roads in this area were apparently underestimated, leading to further blocks in the implementation. Several religious shrines in the area added to the problem, what with their shifting becoming contentious issues. Clearly there had been several aspects that had been overlooked when the original project plan was laid out.

The first stretch of 3 km was opened in October 2006, a full year behind schedule of the entire project. The remaining 18 km was to be completed in June 2007. The cost in the meanwhile increased to Rs. 117 crore. The present state of the

project indicates that the March 2008 completion will be a paper one, with the greater part of work to be done later. In the meanwhile, the traffic on this stretch, which stood at 22,000 vehicles in 2004 during peak hours, has gone up manifold.

In November 2006, a petition signed by concerned residents of the city asked the Highways Department the following questions:

Q1. Is there a slippage from the schedule of completion of the strengthening and widening of the IT Corridor project?

Q2. If there is a slippage, what are the reasons for the deviation from the schedule and where are the revised schedules published?

It is not clear if the petition was answered, but once the road is declared complete, many more questions are likely to emerge.

Answers to Quiz

1. Toshiba; 2. Kosovo; 3. Fidel Castro; 4. Ralph Nader; 5. *No Country for Old Men*; 6. Pakistan; 7. Microsoft; 8. Singapore; 9. Steve Fossett; 10. M.S. Dhoni and Andrew Symonds.

* * *

11. Taj Mahal; 12. India Cements group; 13. M. Bakthavatsalam; 14. Pennai and Marulnikkiyar respectively; 15. Uttamadhanapuram Venkatasubbaiyer; 16. Marathas; 17. Scheduled Tribes in India as recognised in the Constitution; 18. Stanley Reservoir; 19. Keezhperumpallam; 20. P.U. Chinnappa in *Uthama Puthiran*.

EIGHTH DENSEST METRO IN THE WORLD

(Continued from page 1)

township policy". The Ministry envisages appointing a consultant for coordinating with State governments on the proposed townships. It is understood that these initiatives will be mandatory for States, if they propose to avail funds under the Jawaharlal Nehru National Urban Renewal Mission (JNNURM). The States will also be asked to reform their land policies, including the reduction of stamp duty to 5% and the removal of the Urban Land Ceiling Act wherever it is applicable presently. The stamp duty at present is 8% in Tamil Nadu. The Urban Land Ceiling

Act was repealed in the State in 1999.

The Centre is also proposing the redefining of city municipal limits. A National Urban Commission is being set up to focus on developments in towns and cities and to increase their limits. This move is meant to change the urban-rural equation in the cities and, thereby, redefine the density of population. It has been noted that while the population of India grew 2.8 times between 1951 and 2001, the urban population increased 4.6 times.

The extent of Chennai city is about 157 sq.km and the Chennai metropolitan area is 1117 sq.km. Within this 157

sq.km city, the prevailing density is 247 persons per hectare while the density in the suburbs is only 59 persons per hectare. The focus should certainly be on the development and densification of the suburbs.

While this emphasis on surrounding areas is welcome, it is to be hoped that the city, which is already bursting at its seams, will not be neglected. Also, a good plan for development of satellite towns would envisage their being independent entities, thereby reducing the daily influx and exodus of population in the metro resulting in traffic chaos and adding to the pollution. Time alone will tell as to what the new plan will have for this city.

GOING... GOING... AND REBORN TO KEEP UP WITH A CHANGING CITY



• Our OLD is of Saraswathi Stores, once the pride of Mount Road from where A.V. Meyyappa Chettiar (AVM) sold the Odeon and, later, the Saraswathi Stores 78 rpm records. After the gramophone business closed and the company shifted to more modest premises on TTK Road, the building, once a handsome colonial structure, became AVM Dasa, a fine restaurant which closed for reasons never explained fully (above, right). Last year, the heritage building was pulled down and this extraterrestrial structure has been constructed. That is the NEW. (Photos courtesy: OLD from Appachi, the biography of A.V. Meyyappan Chettiar, and the NEW from R. SARAVANAN.)



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Madras in the 1890s

(Continued from page 5)

tanks at a height of 44 feet and supplied to the city. Governor Napier inaugurated it on 13-5-1872.

Piped water came into vogue but still the water contained germs and insects. The rich people used to get pure water from Villivakkam. Even doctors advised that this water was good for health. This water was carried by Brahmins in pots and distributed at one anna per pot. Though water position improved in 1940-41, the population was increasing day by day. In summer it became worse. There will be relief if the Krishna-Pennar project is implemented. But there are two obstacles – damages to fields and to gardens. The scheme is expected to be implemented soon.

Sri V.D. Krishnaswamy, M.A., had written in 1939 as follows:

“In 1639, Europeans made the mistake of settling here, knowing the water problem. There is no development regarding water scarcity.”

In 1949 also the position is the same. Cooum River is flowing through the centre of Madras. It is of no use except to spread bad smell. After coming to Madras I have seen several changes but some things are still in the same state as before – the impurities in piped water, the bad odour from the River Cooum, and the dirty water in the temple tanks. I doubt very much whether these will ever improve in future.

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