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MUSINGS

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Two threats to a green city

Two major construction projects, we hear, have been approved by the Tamil Nadu Government and are due to be implemented shortly. Without Environmental Impact Assessments. Not being industries, perhaps, they do not require EIAs. But when some of the City's natural resources are to be depleted, surely it would be a nice gesture if not only EIAs are made but if also concerned citizens are given a public hearing. Will Government please oblige, even at this late hour? We hope it will.

CASE I involves building four-storey apartment blocks in Government Estate Park for MLAs and the to-be-MLCs who will take office when the Legislative Council (Upper House) is revived. In the past, comfortable rooms in a legislative hostel were always considered adequate for our represen-

tatives, but apparently each one now wants a FLAT. Now we don't grudge them the flats, but wonder whether it is really necessary to build them next door to the Legislature and in a Park, one of the last open places in the City, at that!

During the Jayalalitha regime, it was proposed to build tower blocks in Government Estate for this purpose and sev-

By the Editor

eral acres were earmarked. But now, while the buildings planned are of more reasonable height, they are likely to occupy DOUBLE the space in the park. While in the earlier case, what trees were left would have had little effect, in the present case, though what trees are left might serve a more useful purpose, more trees are likely to be cut.

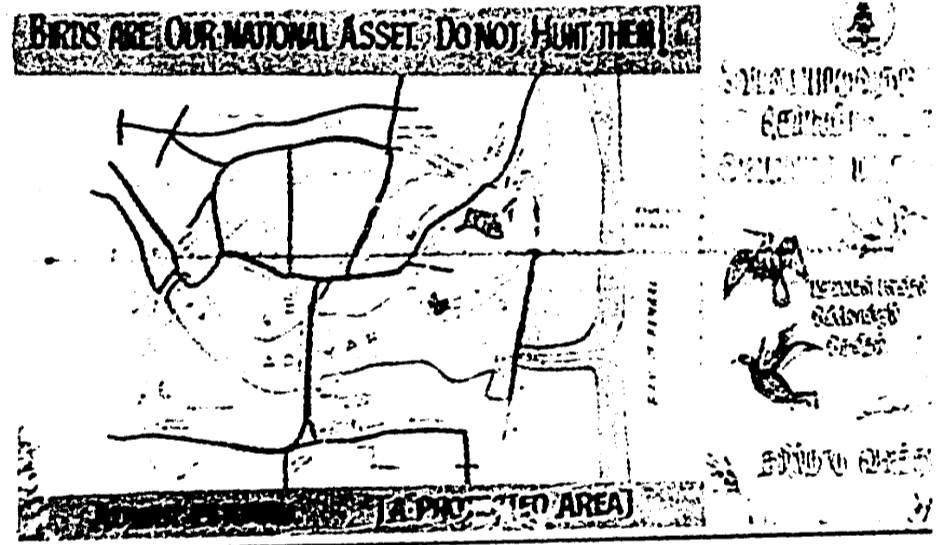
And it is this business of reducing green cover that is causing us concern. Surely legislators need not be housed next to the legislature. Surely accommodation can be built for them elsewhere, say in the Taramani area. In fact, we'd really be happy if both legislature and legislators, all government, in fact, were moved out of the City, to a new capital. But in the event no one buys that idea, why doesn't Government look for another site for these flats for legislators?

On the other hand, if Government is determined to build here, surely, with a park and its trees being threatened, an EIA and a public hearing are called for before any further steps are taken to cut down trees here or start building work?

CASE II pertains to the protected Adyar Creek Area that is part of the Adyar Estuary 'sanctuary'. Already, building



A part of Government Estate (above) that is likely to vanish if plans go through to develop apartment blocks here for State legislators. (Photograph by RAJIND N CHRISTY.) And below, Madras Musings' favourite map, still missing from its once-upon-a-time location by Elphinstone Bridge in Adyar. It is published once again here as a reminder that the PROTECTED Adyar Estuary and Creek areas are under severe threat, both by private builder and Government.



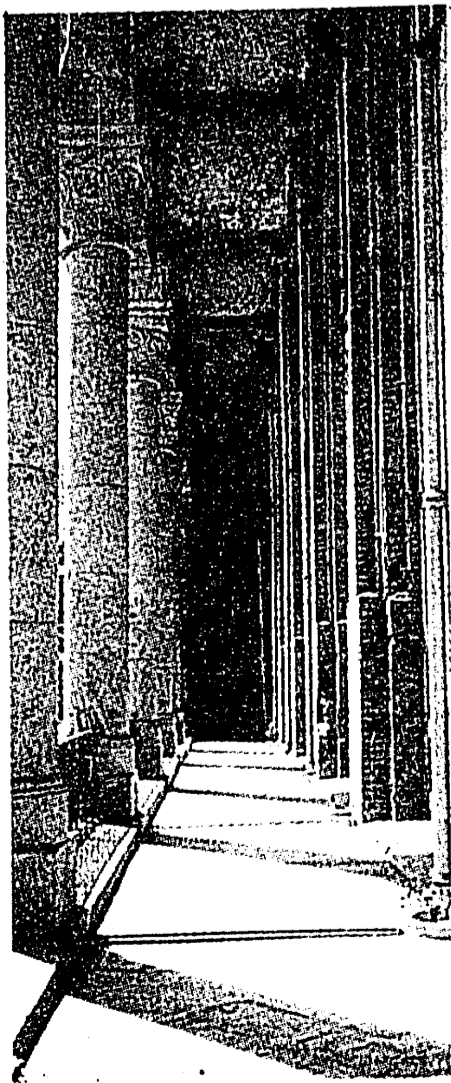
by private parties goes on here with impunity, despite the

Coastal Zone Protection laws being breached. But must Government add to this threat to a sanctuary to which birdlife flock from as far as Siberia every winter?

In this instance, the Metropolitan Development Authority has plans to convert several acres of the Creek, in the Fore-shore Estate area, into an entertainment park. This may be the lesser of the two evils, considering that at one time a shopping complex and mofussil bus terminus were proposed for the area. But even as a man-developed park, with picnic sites, boating and water sports, food stalls and souvenir booths, parking lots and public transport termini, can you imagine what this will do to the birdlife that frequents the area? Few cities in India have such natural resources like the Adyar Estuary and its parkland. Must we ruin it as we are ruining the Marina?

Surely this is another case for an EIA and a public hearing? Will the Government oblige? Or will it continue to ignore those who call for the protection of this City's natural resources and its manmade heritage?

HAVE EXPERIENCE, WILLING TO HELP



A dilapidated corridor of Senate House, with vegetation growing in it. (Photograph by RAJIND N CHRISTY.)

Our story on the sorry state of Senate House and the call for starting work again on restoring it to its former splendour appeared at a rather unfortunate time (MM, November 16th) by unhappy coincidence. We deeply regret the passing away of the Chancellor of the University and our deepest sympathies go out to the Vice Chancellor in his hour of tragedy. But we refer to Senate House again because since the story appeared we have received scores of calls from former graduates of the University of Madras wanting to know how they could help in restoring it to its former handsomeness and usefulness. Perhaps the Registrar and other senior faculty might like to respond to what we had written in our November 16th issue.

One of those who called us had an offer which those at the helm of affairs at the University might like to consider. In this case, he rang us and said, "As a

graduate of the University of Madras in its heyday, I'd like to do something to restore Senate House, where I received my degree. I can arrange for a substantial financial contribution. But I can also do more. I now work with an organisation which has restored old buildings in all parts of the country for its use. We have a department that specialises in restoration work. I can get our experts down and arrange for the work to be done under their supervision. Can you get someone to accept this offer?"

Yes, Madras Musings can get several people together to restore Senate House — and several other historical buildings in Madras. But who will accept this offer? It's up to you, University of Madras.

POSTSCRIPTS

• The meeting scheduled for later this month to listen to,

and discuss, the suggestions of the Consultative Groups working with the Sustainable Chennai Project (MM, December 1) has been indefinitely postponed. It is such postponements since the beginning of the Project that make many wonder whether the aims of the Project will ever be fulfilled and whether its suggestions will rate anything more than pigeon-holing!

• Apropos our reference to George and Verghese (MM, December 1), a reader telephoned in the other day to say the original Malayalam version of George was Geeverghese and that this was later shortened to 'Verghese'. He also listed several other such Malayalam 'Christian' names that had similarly got shortened over time. (Also see 'Our Readers Write', Page 3.)

— The Editor

A chat with the busiest Secretary

A man of few words but geared to action, P.C. Cyriac, the State Industries Secretary, is perhaps the busiest and most sought-after bureaucrat ever since the new government assumed office. From that time, he has been in the midst of scores of negotiations that have resulted in the signing of MOUs with major industries like Ford of the U.S., Hyundai and Kumho, both from South Korea, Pilkington, U.K. Saint Gobain, France, and Ashok Leyland.

Though upbeat about the industrial scenario in the State, Cyriac is also down-to-earth

points out that the State received 307 investment proposals for Rs.90,650 crore but most of them are only on paper, only 23.9% of the total investment proposed being under implementation. While in terms of fresh investment proposals the States ranks third in the country, it ranks eighth in terms of projects under implementation.

Over the years, the share of Central projects in the State has also come down, from 8% in 1969-70 to 4.8% in 1993-94, Cyriac draws attention to. At present, there are 41 Central projects planned for the State, with an outlay of Rs.25,290

Venkatachari Jagannathan looks at THE INDUSTRIAL SCENE

when he states that most of the projects are only on paper — as yet! But Cyriac is convinced that the State is the ideal destination for locating industries.

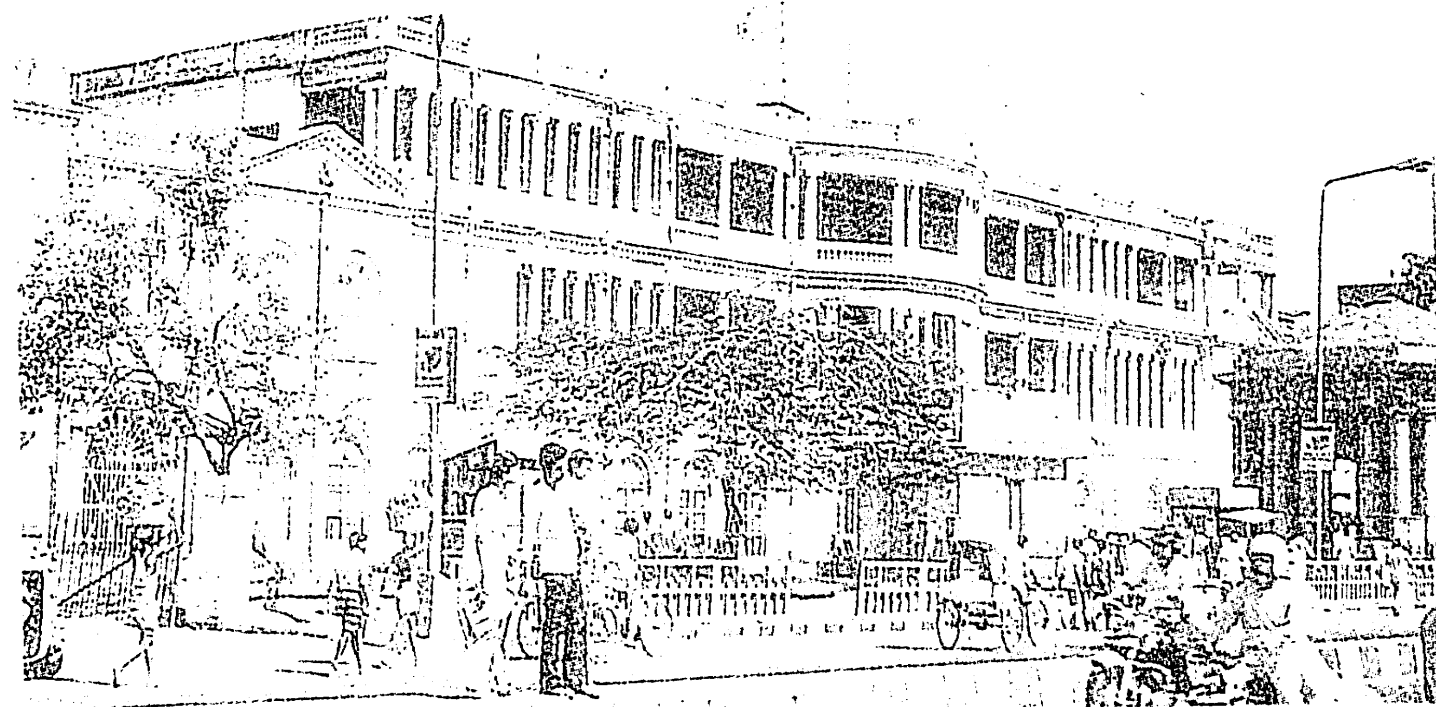
Bringing in a whiff of fresh air and transparency into the Department, Cyriac is easily approachable by all. In fact, he enjoys his present assignment mainly because of the opportunities it gives him to meet people from all parts of India and the world.

Though Tamil Nadu is one of the leading industrialised States in the country, there has been, in the post-liberalisation era, a slide in terms of new investment proposals when compared with other less-industrialised States, Cyriac feels. He

crore, but most of them are just on paper, he reveals. The expansion plans of Madras Refineries and the Salem Plant have been pending for long. And more than four months have passed since the National Thermal Power Corporation expressed its willingness to set up a 2000 MW power station, nothing being heard about since.

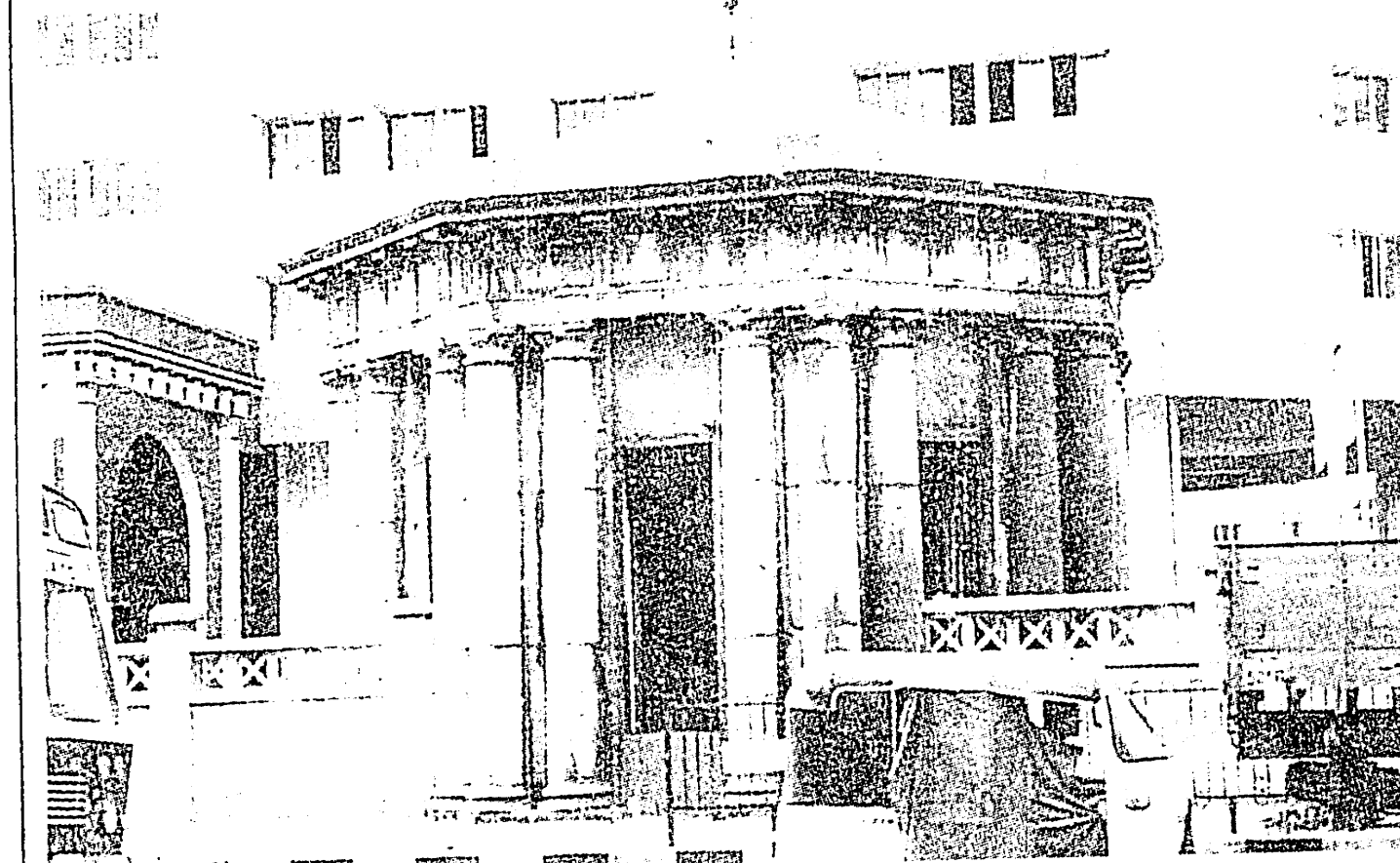
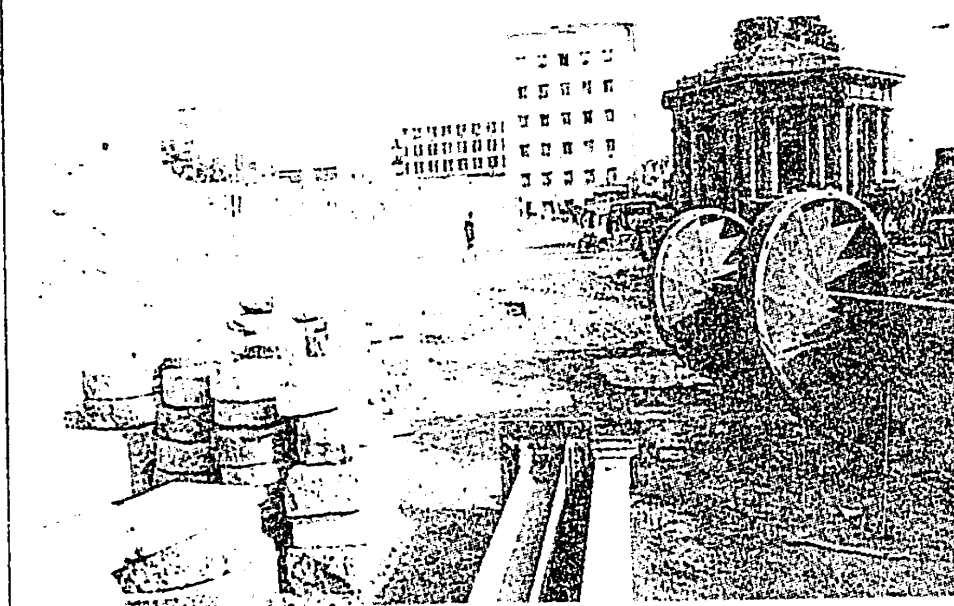
What are you going to do about this situation, I ask. And suggest that the lack of single-window clearance may be one of the reasons for the non-implementation of projects. "Yes, the absence of single-window clearance is one of the reasons," Cyriac agrees and states

(Continued on Page 7)



THE OLD... & THE NEW

When Bentinck's Building, built to house the Supreme Court of Madras in 1793 and, later, used as the



Collectorate, was threatened during the MGR era, heritage buffs and conservationists managed to get the wreckers' hammers stopped. Government, however, emptied the building in 1985 — and in 1991-92, after sufficient growth had sprouted, had its

engineers condemn it. There's a lesson in this story for all conservationists who get the destruction of heritage buildings stayed; they also have to get orders for the restoration and proper use of such buildings.

While we wait for what's going to happen to Police Headquarters, we note that a new Collectorate has come up on the site of Bentinck's Building — and it certainly does not echo the old Regency style as had been promised by the engineers who condemned the old building in their eagerness to get to work on the NEW. However, as seen in our OLD, all that was left after the destruction of Bentinck's Building was the Cornwallis Cupola, built for the peregrinating Cornwallis Statue in 1925. And that Cupola seems to have got a new lease of life in our NEW. (Photographs — OLD from our files; NEW by RAJIND N CHRISTY.)

An Indian first — the Brazilian way

(By A Staff Reporter)

Another milestone was passed in the history of cardiac surgery in India when a 'Batista operation' was performed in November, by Dr. K.M. Cherian and his team, at the Institute of Cardio Vascular Diseases (Madras Medical Mission). The surgery, which could allow people to avoid heart transplants, was performed for the first time in the country.

The operation defies conventional wisdom, because it removes living tissues from the heart. The size of the enlarged heart is reduced by cutting out a large slice of living muscle from the main pumping chamber, which is then stitched together while the patient's heart is beating.

There were 47 patients, including children, on the waiting list for transplants at MMM since its transplant programme began in September 1995. About two-thirds of them had died due to non-availability of organs at the time of this surgery. The 28-year old woman who was operated on was dying due to non-availability of a suitable organ. Now, she is on the road to recovery.

A *New York Times* report says that Dr. Randa J.V. Batista, "working under primitive conditions in a small rural hospital in Brazil, developed this bold new operation for heart failure, (which) promises to ultimately allow tens of thousands of people to resume daily activities, stop many medications and avoid transplants".

Dr. Batista says he has had excellent success in performing

the operation on more than 300 patients since 1994, near Curitiba in Southern Brazil. Several heart surgeons say they have come away amazed after watching Dr. Batista do the operation in Brazil or in visits to hospitals in the United States. After shedding their scepticism, several surgeons have performed a small number of the operations at hospitals in the United States, Britain, Italy and other countries...

The heart is basically a pump, and experts say Dr. Batista's operation makes the failing heart a better pump by permitting the left ventricle, its main pumping chamber, to contract more effectively.

The operation is 'mind boggling' and 'one of the most important developments in heart surgery in years', American doctors say ...

Dr. Batista's medical visitors say they have been astonished to learn that an operation that removes functioning muscle, though abnormal, works. The reason is that it defies a basic principle of cardiology, which is not to remove living tissues. And visitors have been surprised at how a surgeon could develop a novel, potentially important operation using archaic equipment and without much of the sophisticated technology that is standard in operating rooms in the U.S.A. and elsewhere ...

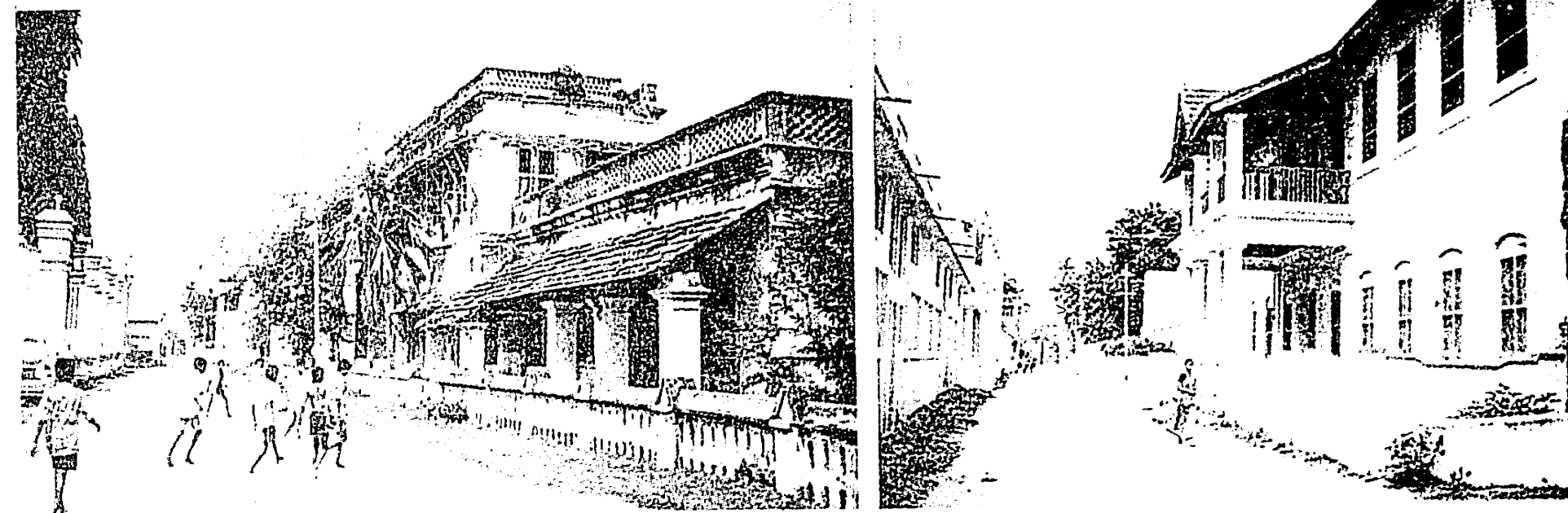
The Brazilian surgeon has told visitors that his interest in cardiology began as a child when he often dissected hearts of animals he found on the farm where he was raised. After medical school in Brazil, he trained in surgery in Boston, then specialised in heart surgery in Toronto. Dr. Batista re-

turned to Brazil to work with poor people.

Dr. Batista first performed an operation for heart failure about 12 years ago on a young girl, who survives. But he waited until 1994 to do the next one, after developing a different version on sheep ...

Dr. Batista's unconventional style has put off many heart surgeons. He fills his lectures with metaphors, slides of snakes, bicycle tyres and plants. 'His message sometimes gets lost but if he stuck to reporting numbers instead, people would be impressed,' says Dr. Patrick M. McCarthy of the Cleveland Clinic, where the technique has been used.

As studies in it get underway in several hospitals worldwide, Dr. Batista's operation awaits the day when it will be considered Standard Medical Practice.



Buildings of another age in King's Street, Tranquebar.

Tranquebar cries for restoration

The view from the upstairs verandah was breathtaking. On the left lay the Bay of Bengal, its pure white surf crashing inexorably onto a slowly yielding beach. Only a few metres remained of a brick pier along which gentlemen and ladies, my great grandparents among them, used to stroll along on an evening. Parts of the solid brick quay had been turned through almost 90 degrees by the wild surf and the shifting sands.

In front of the house was a large maidan, and at the end of its rose the bulk of the Dansborg. Beyond the fort was a dream-cape of small fields, emerald green after the recent rains, an inlet that was actually the mouth of a river, and a sort of estuarine topography.

To the west, I looked straight down King Street, "the only street" in Tranquebar, with its town gate that, miraculously, still has its wooden doors.

I had risked life and limb to get to this verandah, but the risk

had been worth it. I was reluctant to descend. One storey of the former Governor's house in Tranquebar (or Tarangambadi), is equal to two of a modern pill-box building. The air is so clear, so pure as to make a pollution-affected city-dweller choke and gasp. The only sound is that of the sea. I wished I could have been on this verandah on a full moon night.

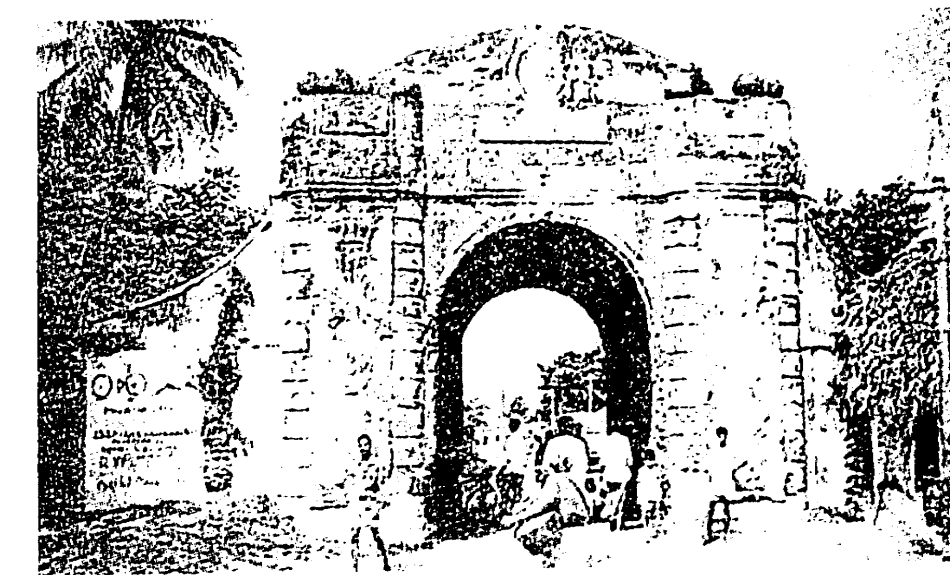
Yet, for all this beauty, and the abundance of Tamil-Damish-British history packed into such

the historical town for tourism. There was even talk of restoration — which usually means substituting traditional building techniques with crack-prone cement, festooning 18th Century buildings with dozens of exposed tube-lights and plastic electrical conduits, and replacing solid, old 'unsafe' buildings (which usually take about two years to demolish) with modern horrors, in a dozen different colours, that crack,

leak and begin to disintegrate in their first monsoon.

Has any of it happened? What, is the state of Tranquebar now? To begin with, access is poor. It seems that the only way to get to it is to hire a taxi from Mayiladuthurai (what was wrong with the old name Mayavaram?), Pondicherry or Karaikal. There ARE mofussil buses, but finding one going to Tranquebar is tedious. For instance, you have to go to the main bus stand, at any of these towns, where all the signs are in Tamil only. A foreigner (and that would include anyone who does not read Tamil) would be completely lost. Inquiries of the bus drivers and conductors at the bus stands, in perfectly good Tamil, brought replies that were not rude, but a little indifferent, and much too sketchy. Any more questions elicited the inevitable "Theriyallai". The 'Enquiries and Reservations' window at the Karaikal bus stand remained obstinately closed (on a Thursday) and well before and after lunch.

Once you've managed to get on the right bus, fares are pleasantly cheap. Not all tourists might wish to pay for taxis, and not all might even want to travel by them, preferring instead to move around like the average Indian.

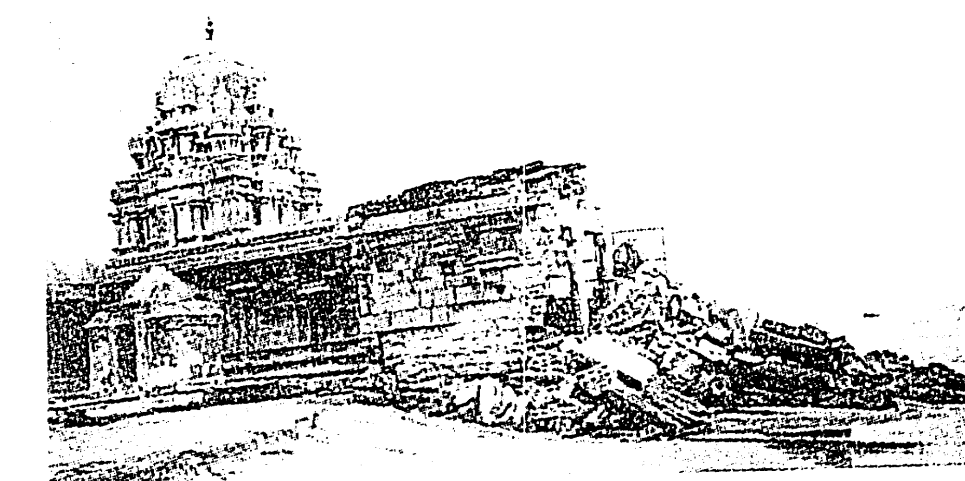


The gate that once provided access to Tranquebar

by Simeon Mascarenhas

a small area in a (perhaps, mercifully) forgotten corner of one of the most vibrant parts of Tamil Nadu, all is not well. Something is definitely rotten in the Dansborg.

All of Tranquebar is under the 'care' of the Tamil Nadu Department of Tourism. Not so very long ago there was a plethora of reports, articles, photographs and proposals for (Oh, my God!) 'development of



Sea erosion takes its toll of the Masilaminathar Temple and Dansborg's (the Fort) quay in Tranquebar. (All photographs by RAJIND N CHRISTY.)



A heritage site in waiting

TARANGAMBADI, queen of the Coromandel coast in Nagapattinam Quaid-e-Milleth District, was designated a special tourism area over three years ago and Government passed orders for its development. The Danes, to whom it once belonged — they called it TRANQUEBAR — promised assistance for the restoration of some of the finest colonial buildings of the 17th Century in India. But little has come of these plans, except for the facelift given the two churches in the township.

The Government planned to lease out the fort to the Taj group to develop a heritage hotel. But the Taj group dropped out when the process of land acquisition and other modalities got delayed. Nothing has happened since then, except that the sea has further eaten away substantial parts of the coast and is very near the Danish fort now. Half the Masilaminathar temple on the coast has been damaged by its relentless onslaught.

The fort was built by Admirals Ove Gedde and Roland Grappe in the 1620s close to the sea. In 1624, it became the property of the King of Denmark and in 1825 it was ceded to the English East India Company. A significant event in the history of Tarangambadi was the arrival of Bartholomaeus Zeigenbalg (1706-1719), a Lutheran missionary who resurrected printing in India here, after its introduction by the Portuguese on the West Coast and its subsequent fading out.

During the recent visit to Tamil Nadu of the Danish Minister for Development Cooperation, Poul Nielson, Tranquebar figured in several discussions. But even after his visit to the former Danish possession, the Minister was not as forthcoming as the Tamil Nadu tourism authorities would have liked — there was no mention of Tarangambadi or Tranquebar in the post-visit Danish communique.

Today's article and another next fortnight are published as reminders to all concerned that Tranquebar is worth preserving and developing as a heritage holiday site — which it has been declared. The articles were written over a year ago by a Madras who was visiting from Australia. Little has changed since then.

— THE EDITOR

world to simply strengthen these defences and save the land and the historic temple in the 1970s when the Department of Tourism took over.

(Continued next fortnight)

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A Season with Theatre too

This year's music and dance season has several interesting theatre presentations which should make the Season more exciting.

Chennai Kalai Kuzhu, a street-theatre group in the City, is celebrating its twelfth anniversary. Pralayan, the coordinator of the group, which consists of people from various walks of life, laments that the scenario for serious Tamil theatre in Chennai is not very promising. There is no development in the theatre scene on the professional front and the few amateur troupes centre on movie personalities. Only Koothupattarai and Chennai Kalai Kuzhu, with their different ap-

proaches to theatre and message-dissemination, produce plays regularly and stage them at frequent intervals in the City. Street-plays can be said to constitute the major component of serious theatre activities in Tamil Nadu.

Chennai Kalai Kuzhu is organising a people's theatre festival on a national scale to commemorate its anniversary. The festival will take place from December 26th to 30th at the Museum Theatre. There will be street-plays from 6 to 8 pm in the open air and stage plays indoors from 8 to 10 pm. About twenty troupes from all over India are expected to turn up for the event, including

Habib Tanvir's Naya Theatre, Safdar Hasmi's Jana Natya Manch, Karnataka's Samudaya, Sangha Gethana and Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishath from Kerala. CKK has also planned exhibitions, seminars inter-troupe debates and exchanges of experience. The different groups will also present street-plays and folk dances in the mornings at different venues around Chennai, in schools, hostels, orphanages etc. If anyone is interested in staging a performance during this period, they may contact me (Tel: 4918943/4911536).

The experimental Tamil theatre group Koothupattarai has promised all lighting and sound facilities to CKK for the festival.



Macbeth and his Lady as performed by Koothupattarai — in clowns' masks.

comment on how people, once in a political structure which is totalitarian, do not have a voice. But why use clowns?

There are two reasons, says Pasupathy. The clown make-up obliterates the face and obliterates individuality. So, this production has different people playing Macbeth at different times. Here, *Macbeth* is a play within a play. The actors do it as a form of release. The question is who is the exploited one? Is it the person who runs everything or the people? This production is certainly worth seeing.

down the ladder in imagination compared to Lakshmi's production last year, *Vatavrisikha* ('The Banyan Tree'), telling the story of dance in South India. But there is very good music, as only to be expected from Lakshmi with her musical background. The recordings, however, are slightly confusing here and there, not being synchronised at times. The Ashoka Chakra in the background looks very good, but, somehow, the scene seems like a political production. Some moving scenes, like the weaving on the *charka*, have been very well done.

Answers to Quiz

1. Anna Hazare; 2. The theoretical physicist, Dr. Abdus Salam; 3. The words 'Princess & Prince of Wales', because of the Royal divorce; 4. She was crowned Miss World at Bangalore; 5. Alisha Chinai; 6. 'Batista's Operation', which could help people avoid heart transplants; 7. The Beatles (of course); 8. Andre Malraux; 9. The British Budget papers were leaked to it on the eve of their presentation in Parliament; 10. The crashing of an Ethiopian Airlines plane into the sea off the Comoros Islands; 11. The 1998 Football

World Cup; 12. Suresh Kalmadi; 13. Sukhoi-30; 14. Javagal Srinath; 15. The five-match series between the West Indies and Australia to decide, according to pundits, the best team in the world.

* * *

16. South East Asia Network, a convention of amateur radio operators (Hams); 17. To clean up the Cooum; 18. 'Transport through Time' gallery; 19. Ambattur; 20. It's an accident rescue system, working round the clock, to provide assistance to mishap victims.

A different Macbeth

KPP's senior actor Pasupathy has turned into a director of great promise. His direction of Ionesco's *Macbeth* in Tamil in the clown mode is a delightful production and should not be missed. Pasupathy says that this play is not about individuals or their destinies and their tragedies. It is not like Shakespeare's *Macbeth* at all. It is a political play, with

Independence memory






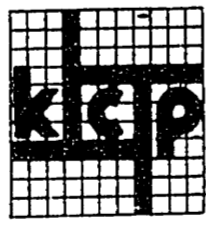




The big event of the Season will be a dance-drama on India's Independence. This tribute to the 50th year of India's Independence is produced and directed by dancer Lakshmi Viswanathan and presents through dance, song and poetry, the events leading up to August 15, 1947.

Chaduranga, her 1996-97 presentation, is a few steps

Ajit Das stands out as a dancer, his extra energy making dance seem a great physical experience and not merely an interpretation of the lyrics in the music. Lakshmi is an intelligent creator of dance-drama and with several more performances during the Season and in the year ahead, can easily prune and make her production tighter.

V.R. Devika

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