

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

# MADRAS

MUSINGS

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## The challenge facing Mayor

Being directly elected by the people of Chennai for a full five-year term, the Mayor is burdened with awesome responsibilities. He today faces an avalanche of issues and problems, each crying for priority attention. Among them are:

- Drainage of the flood waters and combating the imminent threat to the health of Chennai's population caused by squalor and insanitation.
- Repair of roads, buildings and slum settlements ravaged by heavy rains.

- (By M G Devasahayam)
- Improving the quality and quantity of water supply.
  - Cleaning of the sick and stinking waterways, which are a standing shame on the fair name of Madras that is Chennai.
  - Disposal system for the city sewage and solid waste.
  - The chaotic public transport system and the worsening traffic congestion.
  - And, the ever-escalating housing crisis.

The list is endless — and all are real, live and burning issues having direct bearing on the

quality of life of the citizens of Chennai which is perhaps the worst among the megacities of India. And the situation is deteriorating by the day.

There are many reasons for this sorry state of affairs, but the fundamental ones are:

- Lack of funds, and
- Absence of a proper management ethos.

If these two root causes could be tackled and resolved, most of the issues would find their solution. But this is more easily said than done.

The problem of funds has been perennial and there is no magic formula by which funds could be found overnight. Though the new Mayor, with his father as Chief Minister, may have better access to Government funds, it could only be limited, considering the financial position of the exchequer. Scope for additional revenue mobilisation through taxes and levies is restricted, given the poor standard of services offered and a general lack of capacity to pay. As to bilateral and international sources of funding, these are project-related and depend largely on the management efficiency, capability and repayment capacity of the Municipal institutions. Raising funds through debt instruments, such as debentures and bonds, again depend upon the financial health and managerial strengths of the municipal institutions raising the funds.

The new Mayor finds himself in a vicious circle. Levels and standards of services cannot be improved without injecting large funds and these funds will not be available unless efficiency of services are improved substantially. In breaking the vicious circle, the choice is between upgradation of civic services through better management or waiting for adequate funds before taking up augmentation and modernisation of the

(Continued on Page 6)

## Ban on dissection in schools soon

(By a Staff Reporter)

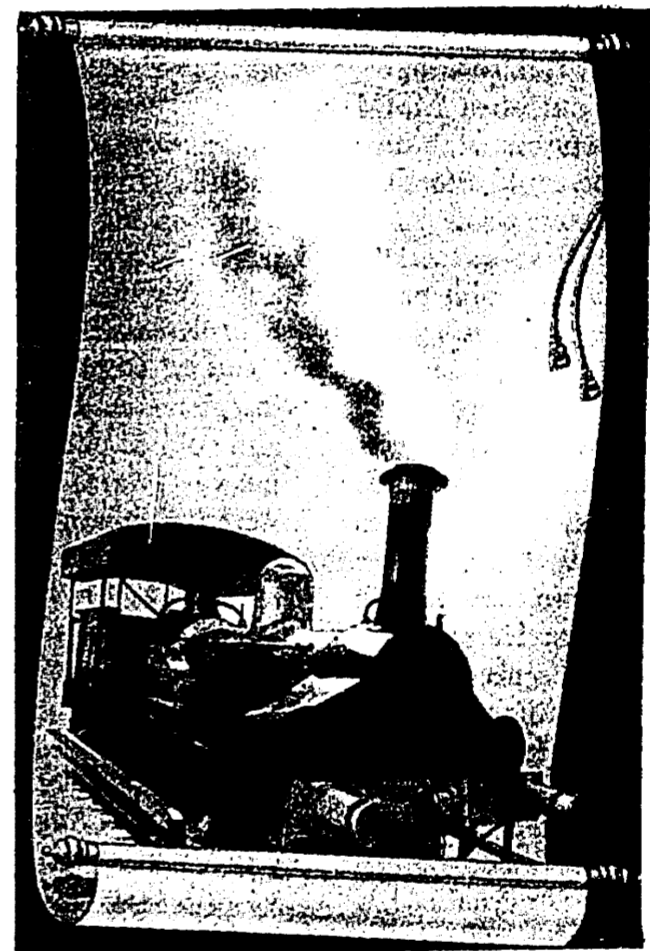
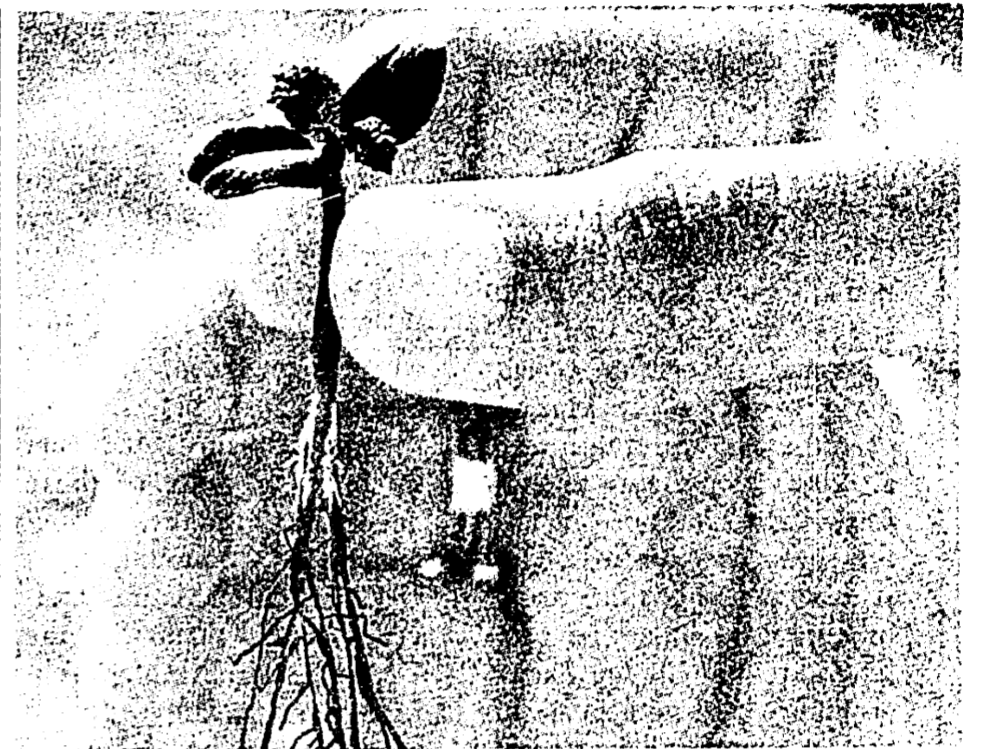
The Committee for the Purpose of Control and Supervision of Experimentation on Animals (CPCSEA) early last year took a unanimous decision that dissection should be banned in all schools in India. Dr. Kiran Singh, Director of the Indian Veterinary Research Institute (IVRI), Professor M. Rajalakshmi of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), and Dr. Vasantha Muthuswamy, Indian Council of Medical Research, were particularly critical of the system of dissection in schools.

The draft rules banning dissection, as formulated by the CPCSEA, were widely distributed to obtain comment. With no substantial objection being raised, the formal announcement by the Minister for Environment and Forests, Government of India, officially banning dissection in all Indian schools upto Standard XII, is awaited.

The CPCSEA was first formed by the Government of India in 1965, with the majority of members of the Committee being directors of Govern-

ment health and research organisations and laboratories. This Committee denounced vivisection as "one of the most inhuman cruelties against animals being perpetrated in the world today. The object of these experiments is said to be in order to advance scientific knowledge, and to undertake research to save or prolong human or animal life and alleviate suffering. In the name of science, however, animals are made to endure the most barbaric tortures ever invented by the human brain, often lasting over long periods and without any sort of anesthetic." This Committee went on to formulate certain rules governing animal experimentation and banned experiments being done on animals "merely for developing manipulative skills", in effect banning dissection in school. However, these rules were never implemented. And the Committee itself faded away after a few years.

Subsequent committees did nothing further. The present Committee was notified by the Government of India in February 1996, and it has acted.



## THOUGHTFUL GREETINGS



If you have built castles in the air,  
your work need not be lost...  
that is where they should be.  
Now put the Foundations under them.

Thoreau

Thank you all for the 'Greetings' you sent all of us at Madras Musings — and particularly for the good wishes that hoped that corporate support would enable Madras Musings to continue to thrive. We'll know more about that in a few weeks, but we are sure your good wishes will go a long way towards ensuring that backing.

Amongst all those greeting cards there were a few which went beyond good wishes. We realise that it is not very fair to single out cards, but these cards did have messages that are dear to us and should be to all readers of Madras Musings — and so we feature them.

From top to bottom, these were the messages: 1) "Your child's future is in your hand today, plant a sapling now and secure your child's tomorrow," urges Sterling Tree Magnum. Whatever you might think of teak promises, there's no gainsaying that planting trees is what we should be committed to. 2) "The FAIRY QUEEN is the oldest and the most beautiful steam engine in the world. Built in 1865... it steams again from Delhi on 1st February..." says the Southern Railway. What it doesn't say is that resurrection of old into gold was by its Perambur workshops. 3) And "The Banyan" quote Thoreau: "If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost... that is where they should be. Now put the Foundations under them." And still stronger foundations is what institutions with causes to serve, and that includes Madras Musings, need to develop. May 1997 see that happen. (Also see page 5.) Incidentally, we also received several cards with Manohar Devadoss's sketches of heritage buildings in the city... and he continues to keep them alive in memory beautifully.



# Biotech park for Chennai

Chennai is to get one of the three biotechnology parks being established in the country. The other host cities are likely to be Pune and New Delhi.

Disclosing this to the Press at the conclusion of the workshop on 'Mobilising Science and Technology for Sustainable and Economic Growth; Women, Science and Technology', Manju Sharma, Secretary, Department of Biotechnology, Ministry of Science and Technology, said that one of the parks will be exclusively reserved for women entrepreneurs intending to set up projects based on tissue culture.

About forty women scientists from the Asia-Pacific region participated in the three-day workshop organised jointly by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the M.S. Swaminathan Research Foundation. Dr. Swaminathan, explaining the need to organise an exclusive women scientists' meet, said that sensitisation of gender with regard to technology is a 'must' to bridge gender differences. According to him, the workshop finalised 17 projects, with the thrust on biotechnology, to be taken up by governmental and non-governmental agencies.

At a public discussion after the seminar, on 'Mobilising women for the development of

Venkatachari Jagannathan looks at THE INDUSTRIAL SCENE

## An unanswered question

Empower women and face the risk of inconvenient questions is not only true of the male but also of the proponents of women's emancipation.

Enthused by the speeches at the discussion, a fresh Ph.D graduate narrated the plight of women students who lack the freedom, and don't get the guidance necessary, in choosing the subject of their choice for their doctoral studies. She asked the main speakers how this could be remedied.

Dr. Kunthala Jayaraman's rather surprising and abrupt response was that the questioner's degree was not worth the paper it was announced on, if she did not know what she wanted to be in the first place! When Dr Vibha Gupte wanted to answer the girl, the moderator, Dr Pankajam Sundaram, Vice-Chancellor, Mother Teresa Women's University, hurriedly proposed the vote of thanks to conclude the discussion on the dot despite the delay of 15 minutes in starting it!

a scientific temper in society', Dr. Kunthala Jayaraman, Dean of Technology, Anna Univer-

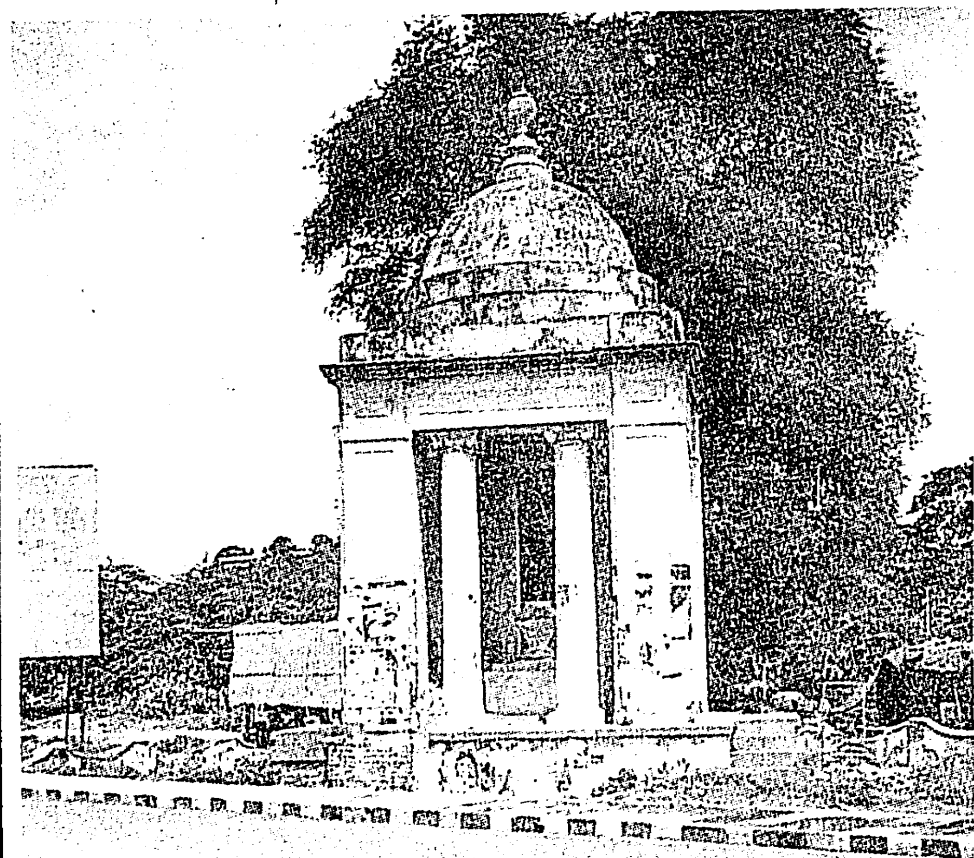
sity, stated that though women excel in traditional technology, they lag behind men when it comes to the advanced levels.

This was echoed by Dr Amelia Ancog, Under Secretary, Science and Technology Services, Legislative Liaison and International Relations, of the Philippines. She revealed that in the Philippines women dominate the disciplines in basic science and technology, whereas men dominate the higher technology. She also pointed out that five per cent of her country's budget was earmarked for women's development.

Dr. Vibha Gupte, Director, Centre for Science for Villages, Wardha, who stood aside the lectern, as, in her opinion, it was not designed keeping women in mind, said that this only reflected the fact that women and their needs are still not understood properly in the countries of the region; programmes conceived should pay more attention to their points of view.

## Merger at AL?

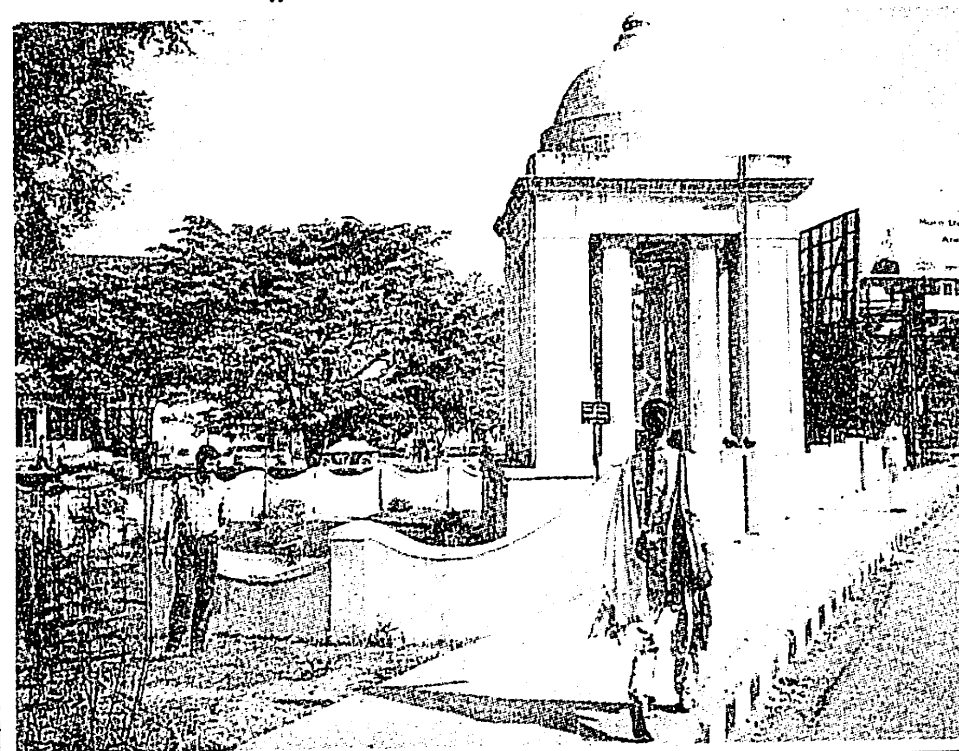
The Rs.3.2 crore equity Automotive Coaches and Components Ltd, a part of the Ashok Leyland Group, has shut down its main activity, building bus bodies, due to lack of orders. Instead, the joint sector company — TIDCO has some



Our NEW and OLD this fortnight show what a scribbling, a lick of paint and restored surroundings can do to a defaced old monument. The Dabrymple Cenotaph, on the GST Road opposite the Alandir Municipality, owes its new look to the Army, whose Area Commandant, Maj.-Gen. Nagra, seems bent on sprucing up much of Army-owned land. We only hope that he doesn't hand over to the Civil Authority any of the historic buildings under Army occupation... Even an old barrack or two deserves to be retained as a reminder of times past.

## THE OLD... & THE NEW

To get back to the Dabrymple Cenotaph, it was erected in memory of Lt. Col. Sam Dabrymple, C.B., of the Madras Artillery by his brother officers. Dabrymple was only 49 when he died on 12.5.1821 in the St Thomas' Mount cantonment, an officer beloved by many. Not far from the Cenotaph is the former Artillery Mess, a building that deserves to be decreed a heritage building. It is now the OTA Officer's Mess. (Photographs by RAJIND N CHRISTY.)



## They often help — and could do with YOURS

# Handling special children

Many factors before, during and after birth have been increasingly held responsible for congenital disabilities among infants. While the baby looks normal, its movements are sluggish, eyes do not focus and even the social smile surfaces rarely. Recognising the urgent need for early diagnosis of neonates and for quick remedial steps to be implemented, some centres in Chennai have begun programmes to educate and improve parents' awareness of their child's special needs.

The Public Health Centre at Mambalam, set up by the dynamic M.C.Subrahmanyam, recently teamed with the Spastics Society of India — Madras and began yet another free community service in this area.

A Neonatal Camp at the Centre screens low-weight birth babies for any damage that may have occurred to the brain. Poor healthcare by expectant mothers, insufficient oxygen supply to the foetus or neonatal jaundice can contribute to this.

"We want to help newborns from 0-3 months by keeping a record of their history upto the age of 2-3 years. Our aim is to help these children come up to normal levels through early detection and treatment," explains Thothadri, Secretary, Public Health Centre.

After confirmation by doctors, cases are shortlisted and parents are then taught a schedule of gentle stimulation exercises to be imparted to each child at home. This involves body movements and the use of all the senses — especially seeing, hearing and touching. Constant repetition of the activities at home helps the children use their bodies as well as minds. "We plan a long-term programme with free medicines, MRI and periodic monitoring," says Thothadri.

Besides weekly or monthly checks, follow-up exercises and training are imparted by counsellors of the Spastic Society. "We are even working out a training programme for mothers to help their special children reach the same milestones as normal ones," says Poonam Natarajan, Director, Spastics Society of India — Madras.

"The structured play activity can be easily co-ordinated by family members to develop the child's skills from Day One," she adds. "Levels of disability could vary from mild, moderate

and severe to the profoundly affected. Once the doctor's referral is made, our counsellors visit the Centre twice a week or parents even visit us directly for help and guidance."

The younger the child is when a stimulation programme begins, the less retarded or delayed he will be when he is older. "Children who are developmentally slow need the same stimulation — talking to them, music, games, adventure and love — that any child needs," Natarajan says. Except they need more of it.

Indira Jayakrishnan

## Innovative assistance

Taking a bold new step forward, the newly-opened Spastics Society of India — Madras building at Kotturpuram has set up an Independence-in-Living Flat.

Two final-year students can spend six months of independent living here, learning to tackle everyday chores. This will be the final part of the Vocational Skills programme, which, besides teaching students skills, makes them plan their lives by themselves.

"We do hope parents realise that the children don't want to be utterly dependent all their lives. Unless we provide the wherewithal, how can we equip them for their future?" asks Poonam Natarajan of the society.

I.J.

# Advice for Senior Citizens

(By a Staff Reporter)

The Probus Club of Madras, meant exclusively for Senior Citizens, has set up a Madras Citizens Advice Bureau.

Probus, whose members are mainly former IAS, IA & AS, IPS, IRS officers, Defence Services officers, and executives of private and public sector undertakings, will have panels of advisers on various subjects associated with the Bureau. They will be from diverse backgrounds and from as many different localities of the city as possible, so as to enable easy access.

The role of the panellists will be to provide INFORMATION AND ADVICE, free of charge. But his/her role will NOT BE EXECUTIVE.

Some of the typical problems encountered by the elderly on which advice may be sought are:

- An elder has been living alone but now finds it no longer possible to do so. Is there any home for the aged that will look after the person, providing a suitable milieu within the person's means?
- An aged person, or aged couple, are no longer able to cook their own meals; they will welcome meals (or at least some dishes) being brought to their residence. Is any institution or person willing to provide 'Meals-on-Wheels' at an affordable price?
- An elder has become bed-ridden, or nearly so, and his family requires someone, preferably trained, to take care of him at his home. Whom does he contact?
- An aged person who is not well-off has problems with his health and wants advice on which specialist or institution to contact in order to get appropriate treatment within his means.
- An aged pensioner wants to know whether he can get the benefit of a liberalisation in a Pension Scheme, or of a certain Court ruling in regard to pensioners, and seeks advice, including advice on legal redress.
- A person recently retired wants advice on how to invest his savings and retirement benefits in a manner yielding good returns with adequate security.
- A person of advanced age wants to make a disposition of his properties before he dies and

seeks advice on questions such as whether he has to make a Will, and if so how to proceed. What are the alternatives to a Will, and which will be the best in his case, i.e., impose least financial burden on the Estate, while ensuring clear title to the heirs and successors?

● A retired person has entered into an agreement with a Builder to acquire a flat. The Builder has failed to provide the flat according to the agreement. The person seeks advice on legal redress under the Consumer Protection Act or other law.

● An elderly person has a house which he is no longer able to maintain on account of his age, security problems and his strained means. He seeks advice on whether or how he can develop/dispose of the property and secure a smaller accommodation/flat and also get some money in exchange.

● An elderly citizen finds that his telephone bill has been inflated or his telephone goes out of order persistently or that it has to be shifted to a new address. How does he get help?

● An elderly citizen has been faced with revision of property tax for his residence and wants to get the revision done in a manner that is fair.

● An elderly person who wishes to go abroad to visit his relatives seeks advice and assistance on visa and passport formalities, choice of airlines, travel plans and health insurance.

● A widow without family support, who has lost her husband recently, wants help to get a pension, or a family pension, if she is eligible.

● A bright youngster from a low income family seeks advice on choice of a career or further course of study or vocational guidance and support.

The following may be contacted to seek information on the panellists to be contacted:

Mr V Hariharan, Coordinator  
Tel: 6261011

Mr N Subramanian, General Secretary, Tel: 4996905

Mr D Rajasekhar, Secretary,  
Tel: 6213908

Mr A P S Nair, Addl. Jt. Secretary, Tel: 6423256

Capt. M Singa Raja (Retd.)  
Secretary-Civic Affairs,  
Tel: 8282811

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62/63, Greames Road, Madras 600 006.

# A NEED TO SAVE THE SAVER

Almost every day, these days, we are seeing people in Chennai thronging the doorsteps of several finance companies to enquire about the fate of their hard-earned money invested in these companies. These pillars of the middle income group had been lured by the attractive incentives and unimaginable interest offered by these companies without proven track records.

These gullible investors have been discovering over some time now that when their investments mature, payments are never made. The money-gobblers provide an option, either to reinvest the amount and collect cheques for interest (that usually bounce) or face their strong-arm tactics.

The Reserve Bank of India's new rule, that Non-Banking Financial Institutions that have not fulfilled the RBI prudential norms, or have not been rated, cannot offer more than the prescribed ceiling of 15 per cent, came as a death blow to these finance companies which had

been offering exorbitant interest. The companies started to wilt and close their shutters.

Despite the RBI's periodical warnings to the public, and its lists of financial institutions which had not registered themselves with the RBI but were collecting deposits, it was only after Snehaam that realisation began to dawn. But even then, the companies, instead of returning the money, started to preach a financial gospel, supported by some financial pundits, who stated that if all the investors claimed their money back at the same time, no finance company would be in a position to return the amount. But would these pundits stand guarantee for the return of the amount? There was no one willing to do that!

Rob Peter and pay Paul was the way the chit (cheat) companies that mushroomed in the Seventies operated. This was cured by the Prize Chits and Money Circulation Schemes (Banning) Act, 1978, and the Chit Funds Act, 1982.

Now, in the mid-Nineties, the slogan of those promising investors a fortune has been 'Rob Peter and Paul, and God will pay'. What, then, is the cure for the cancerous growth of these bogus finance companies which not only loot the savings of the innocent, but also

● by S. Suresh

slowly demolish the reputation, image and savings habit built over years by Government, the public and private sectors, banks and *nidhis*. (Some benefit funds and *nidhis*, it must be warned, tend to provide information for the real estate Mafia on mortgaged properties; the brighter side of the *nidhis* is that they eliminate the interest greedy pawnbrokers seek.)

The solution seems to be: Suggestion 1: Imposing a ban on the formation of these financial institutions and closing down existing companies

after monitoring their repayment capacity.

**Consequences and Feasibility:** This would be very difficult from the legal and constitutional angle. Further, these companies might be resurrected in new guises. It should be remembered that the purpose is not to prevent the functioning of these companies but only to prevent their illegal activities and put a damper on their seeking public money through false claims and tempting prizes.

**Suggestion 2:** Forming an effective control mechanism to monitor these finance companies, such as a Depositors Protection Council along the lines of the Consumer Protection Council. The Council should act as an Ombudsman for the public and take steps to monitor and control the companies.

**Consequences and Feasibility:** The formation of a Depositor Protection Council is the proper approach, as it paves the way for the establishment of a social organisation which

could act under the guidance of the structure. As is known, even the limited provision for RBI intervention, by way of inspection of books, is normally invoked only if a depositor makes a complaint, but complaints do not come in unless there is a default. And by then, it is too late. The Depositor Protection Council could function as a preliminary investigating authority on getting first-hand information about any finance company, whether registered or not. It could also function as a mentor for a public in need of guidance.

It is a universal principle that every financial institution should adhere to prudential norms to ensure the safety of public funds. Every era witnesses societal changes. It is therefore necessary that the rules governing society must also change. The formation of a Depositor Protection Council would really erase the apprehension in the minds of the public and make people's lives easier. Will Government act?



# Tiger! Tiger! Burning bright

(By A Staff Reporter)

Few people have heard of the Kalakad-Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve (KMTR) in Tirunelveli-Kattabomman District, in the deep south of Tamil Nadu, close to the Tambaraparani river. Even fewer are aware that this reserve has actually been a part of 'Project Tiger' since 1989 and a very successful part too.

It was in 1962, many years before 'Project Tiger', that the Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve was set up under the Wild Birds and Animals Protection Act, perhaps India's first wildlife conservation programme after Independence. Twenty-

seven years later, the two sanctuaries of Mundanthurai and Kalakad, 817 sq km in extent in the core area, were merged into one, forming KMTR, the southernmost 'Project Tiger' reserve in India.

KMTR had a 17-23 tiger population, 100-plus leopards and 24 elephants, according to a 1993 survey. The numbers have very probably increased now, it is believed. Other animals sighted include Nilgiri rahr, sambar, mouse deer, gaur, civet, dhole, jackal, hyena and lesser jungle cats. The Nilgiri langur, the common langur, the bonnet and lion-tailed

macaques and the slender loris, besides nearly 100 species of birds, make this little-known reserve one of the most exciting places for a wildlife enthusiast.

To improve the sanctuary, efforts are being made to reduce the dependency of the villagers surrounding KMTR on the resources of the forest. There are plans for a five-year scheme to look after the needs of these villagers and to sustain a viable ecological development programme. Bio-mass plants and small-scale business units for these villagers are to be created with the help of funds (appx. Rs 8 crore) from the World Bank.

Although there has been a ban on hunting tigers since 1970 (the Wildlife Protection Act came into force in 1972), the threat to the animal remains, mainly from poachers and the fast depleting forest cover. To combat the former in KMTR, forest staff have been given sophisticated communication equipment and firearms and training in handling both. They have also been made aware of the need for forest conservation and the crime that poaching is. This action, together with the outreach to the villagers, has enabled Tamil Nadu's 'Project Tiger' make substantial progress in conservation at KMTR.

## SPONSORSHIP

(Continued from Page 7)

cally, by the private sector. Most of them don't pay attention to the bottomline, which should matter most. They may make money, but they are not bothered by the negative social index, namely the declining demand for LIVE music and dance programmes. They don't bother because they receive subsidies regardless of performance. Whoever said that the way to hell is paved with good intentions, is right, at least in this case!

Should the situation be allowed to continue? NO, particularly because the bubble is bound to burst sooner or later. So, what should we do?

I do not suggest stopping sponsorship. I suggest, rather, that it be done discriminatingly, extending support only to organisations truly dedicated to promoting music and dance in a serious way, and even then only to those which would work with the sponsors to develop a substantial audience.

The other day, I heard Mr AL Vadivelu of the Mercantile Credit Corporation speak about his company's sponsorship of cultural events. Mr Vadivelu said bluntly that his company expected to derive discrete

marketing benefits from the activity. In other words, the company was sponsoring cultural events as a commercial proposition.

This may not be true of all companies which extend support to the arts. Altruism may be an important element in the case of some. Indeed, sponsorship may reflect a degree of interest in the arts on the part of a company or its executives, but no one will provide support without expecting some sort of return for the company, or continue to provide such support responsibly without at least some evidence that the support is yielding social benefit.

I am now the Editor of *Srutu*, but I am a management man who was with the UN Development Programme. In New York, I used to focus on persuading the top management to distinguish between activity and result and NOT to be satisfied with levels of money spent on a good cause. I can't say I succeeded fully. Today, I will feel satisfied if I have succeeded at least in planting a few pertinent questions in sponsors and organisers' minds.

N Pattabhi Raman

### Answers to Quiz



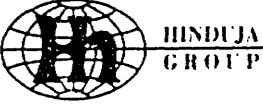


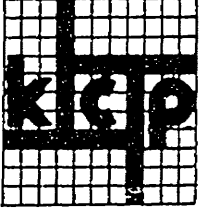




1. Mahaswetha Devi; 2. Dr. David Ho, an AIDS research scientist; 3. The K.S. Subbiah Pillai Trophy, the symbol of supremacy in one-day cricket in the South Zone; 4. Boeing and McDonnell Douglas; 5. J. Jayalalitha; 6. He scored 400 runs in a single day; 7. Bangladesh; 8. *Kundun*; 9. One trillion operations; 10. Peru; 11. Marcelo Mastroiani; 12. Netaji

Subhas Chandra Bose; 13. Carl Sagan; 14. Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber; 15. Dr. Mahathir Mohammed of Malaysia.

\* \* \*

16. Ashokamitran for *Appavin Snehidar*; 17. From Harbour to Tambaram; 18. The Indian History Congress; 19. Green and Blue; 20. Haribhaskar.

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