

WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI

# MADRAS MUSINGS

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## In concert, for safety

*A word or two from consumers*

(By A Special Correspondent)

Like all workshops, the Workshop on Consumer Product Safety held recently at the USIS also tended to wander. There appeared to be greater attention paid to product quality than to product safety, there appeared to be considerable more time spent on personal agendas than on the agenda of ensuring product safety, and there was that usual nitpicking tendency to find fault with Government's representatives. That's par for the course at such gatherings. Nevertheless, there were several nuggets in all this on and off the subject babel.

- The American CPSC's list of investigations included such items as slats on baby cribs and Indian sheer skirts.
- American companies not reporting defective products could be fined upto \$6000 per day per unit from the day of the launch.
- According to WHO, there are only 220 essential drugs needed by any country. In India, 68,000 are manufactured! Let's get back to generic names of drugs, the way Tamil Nadu insists for Government purchases. That helps in getting 30% lower prices.
- 80 per cent of India's population uses traditional medicines on which no data is available.
- Bring back the detailed fact sheets for all medicines.
- Establish standards for diagnostic tools.

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### Consumer activists seek product safety assurance

(By A Special Correspondent)

An authority to ensure consumer product safety, particularly the safety of household products, should be set up in India as soon as possible, insisted in concert consumer groups from all over the country at a recent workshop in Chennai. They also wanted Doordarshan to regularly broadcast, in the regional languages, programmes that would educate the public on the safe use, through proper usage, of the plethora of household consumer products now available to them.

The National Workshop on Consumer Product Safety, a first of its kind in that the focus was on safety, was organised by CONCERT (the Chennai based Consumer Centre for Education, Research, Teaching, Training and Testing) and the USIS. Lawrence Hershman of the US Consumer Product Safety Commission played a key role in the workshop by presenting the American experience and

offering insights into the three areas of household products the workshop took as exemplars, namely food items, drugs, cosmetics and toiletries, and household appliances.

There was debate on whether the suggested Authority should be a separate Consumer Products Safety Commission, like the National Human Rights Commission, or whether it should be an extension of the Bureau of Indian Standards with a strong mandate. But there was unanimity that, whatever the umbrella, the proposed Authority should be on the same lines as the American institution, which monitors 15,000 products, receives information from official and individual sources throughout the US on death or injury caused by these products, and has the right to take punitive action against manufacturers; advocate voluntary recall of a product for modifications, insist on withdrawal of

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This new signboard to be seen in many parts of Chennai indicates a member-institution of 'Chennai Health Care'. It is a sign of a pharmacy with a qualified pharmacist and a reputation for service and reliability. (Picture by Rajind N. Christy.)

### Joining hands for better pharma service

The neighbourhood pharmacy is a vital link in the health chain. But how many employ a professionally trained pharmacist who could keep proper stocks, not sell without prescription, and abide by regulations? This is set to change with a new concept, Chennai Health Care being introduced in the pharmacy services in the city.

Eighteen pharmaceutical retail stores in various parts of the City now sport a new signboard with a double C and the Red Cross. They are members of Chennai Health Care, a service concept to promote professionalism in pharmacy services and to serve as a "community pharmacist". All these shops stock delicate temperature sensitive drugs, stored at optimum temperature with the aid of cold storage. A qualified pharmacist is on the premises to advise on the right medicine, dosage to the patient as per prescription, and to warn against self-medication and prescribing medicines to others in the family.

Speaking to *Madras Musings*, the organiser of Chennai Health Care, R. Srinivasan, Joint Secretary of the All India Organisations of Chemists and Druggist, said CHC is a registered non-profit foundation. It is a loose co-operative of medical shops, each a separate business entity with separate dealings with the suppliers. There is no common bulk buying. The members of the group each contribute Rs. 10,000 and the corpus is used to print information brochures for customers on the Do's and Don'ts, train salespersons and update professionally qualified pharmacists on the latest developments in Pharma research. To prevent quack practices the selling of doubtful quality medicines and to run their business on ethical lines, the foundation requires all its members to be of good standing in the trade with no previous criminal proceeding against them.

— Rajind N. Christy

## Classifying NBFCs, the urgent need

The urgent need of the hour is classification of non-banking finance companies (NBFCs) on the basis of their risk profile or nature of lending, felt T.T. Srinivasaraghavan, Deputy Managing Director, Sundaram Finance Ltd. "Only then will an investor know the kind of business an NBFC is engaged in and be able to assess the investment he is making,"

he explained. He was speaking at a seminar on 'The Role of NBFCs and Investor Awareness', organised recently by the Civic Action Group (CAG).

"Risks and returns are inextricably linked. So is the safety of deposits which is linked to the health of the industry where they are deployed," Srinivasaraghavan went on. Financing film production, and real estate

purchases carry higher risks than funding purchase of trucks, he pointed out. Categorising the companies engaged in different fields under the omnibus head called 'NBFC' provides a frightening latitude for the players, he said. Most of the unincorporated finance companies which folded up during the last two years were engaged in high risk operations.

Of 45,000 NBFCs only 15-20,000 companies accept public deposits; the balance are investment companies of major industrial groups, he pointed out. Citing the Y.V. Reddy Committee report which stated that just 150 finance companies account for 90% of total public deposits held by NBFCs, Srinivasaraghavan said that it

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# Transparency — and the right to information

Two seminars/workshops *The Man From Musings* attended recently were concerned with, in one way or another, the right to information and, as a logical extension, transparency. One was organised by the Madras Library Association to celebrate its 70th birthday and the other by the Indian Officers' Association to pay greater heed to the fact that the Tamil Nadu Government was the first State Government to legislate a Freedom of Information Act when it passed a bill in 1997.

Cropping up at both were the issues of information storage, access to that information, and its dissemination. At the librarians' deliberations it was pointed out that the enormous archival material on modern India, even if the material of only the last 500 years was looked at, would take a lifetime to be catalogued and stored. And even if that was done, if the present situation was taken as the norm, accessing it would pose problems; one instance cited was an organisation busy with micro-filming its treasures, albeit at a snail's pace, not have sufficient 'readers' or copies for researchers, its budget not permitting anything more than what it was gifted. As for dissemination, if microfilming organisations could not afford viewers, how could a wider public be expected to afford such facilities.

In a curious coincidence, the same analogy was cited with reference to computer-fanatic N Vittal's suggestion to spread the computer culture throughout India by "leapfrogging" the distance we lag behind. The former Electronics Department Secretary and present Chief Vigilance Commissioner was at both gatherings reminded of Marie Antoinette's memorable remark, "If they don't have bread, let them eat cake". It was also pointed out that such leapfrogging might end in a leap into the abyss. On the other hand, several others at both discussions, appeared convinced that the computer age would automatically make information available and, thereby, ensure transparency. "You will be walking corpses if you don't use information technology," warned one speaker.

## Issues ignored

Not looked at, however, at both venues were the issues of accessibility and attitude. This particularly needed examining at the Officers' meet, *The Man From Musings* felt. Both discussions centring on the computer age totally ignored the fact that the vast majority of people in India, those who make a difference with their votes, are unlikely to have access to computers and literacy for ages to come. And to reach out to them, it is officerdom that needs to change its attitude in almost revolutionary fashion. Officers would need to be accessible to anyone — and would also need to undergo a change of attitude, by which they would make themselves easily accessible to the common man, the villager, and be freely willing to answer their questions. That is what is

needed more than computers. Whereas the librarians had grounds to partially ignore this issue, the officers, MMM felt, ignored it only because they have probably blinded themselves to the truth.

Fifty years after Independence it is still fashionable to blame the British for everything but surely senior and retired civilians and officers must remember a different picture of Collectors in the pre- and immediate post-Independence years doing their rounds on horseback and camping in the open or in ramshackle dak bangalows to listen to the woes of the villagers. Attitude to people eking out a living and not involved in the political struggle were much more concerned and caring in those days compared to the treatment people, particularly those without any clout, receive at Government offices nowadays.

Another aspect of the right to information was pointed out at the librarians' conclave. And that was the bureaucracy's tendency to decree a whole world of information 'secret'. Will all the computers in the world make this information available for publication? MMM remembers years off struggle trying to get the Survey of India to release for publication slightly more detailed maps of India than are now being authorised. Despite even more detailed maps of India being available in many countries of the world, thanks to the age of the satellite cameras, these officers would not budge, preventing the country from accessing better maps. To talk of security concerns in con-

## SHORT 'N' SNAPPY

nection with these maps is so much bunkum, but how do you get officialdom to act more liberally? Without the bureaucracy liberalising itself, 'secrets' will remain and information will continue to be restricted.

It is such attitudes to people and information that must first change if freedom of information and one of its consequences, transparency, are to be meaningful, MMM is convinced.

## Seminar snippets

Speakers at both seminars contributed several tidbits of information that caught the attention of *The Man From Madras Musings*. Amongst them were the following:

- There will be a considerable shortfall of foodgrains in India and China in the 21st Century and MINK (the first time MMM had heard the grain bowl of the US, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska and Kansas, called that surplus won't be able to meet the shortfall.
- Indian scientists, once being regularly used as referees by publishers, are no longer popular because, lacking modern communication facilities, they are not able to provide quick responses to papers and manuscripts sent to them.

● A defence magazine sees the future only in small wars and hand weapons, not in global wars and nuclear bombs; the future will be the age of 'terrorist' wars.

● Discretionary powers are always misused, according to elder statesman C Subramaniam.

● I am not an admirer of the police force and have long been one of its foremost critics; I've not been exactly popular for it, stated a senior police officer.

● And if you learnt your history from one of the speakers you would have learnt that one Chola king was ALL Indian kings and the Chola, Pandya and Chera kingdoms were either separately or together India! But MMM does buy the thought that it might have been easier for a peasant to see one of those kings than it would be to see many an officer today. That's that business of attitude MMM was talking about earlier.

## Workshop babel

In the pages of *Madras Musings* this fortnight, *The Man From Madras Musings* notes, there are reports on four seminars/workshops. And there was one thing he noted at all of them, something that is becoming more and more common on every such occasion. Come the discussion session and a handful of delegates seem to monopolise the proceedings, with chairpersons seemingly helpless to stem the flow of words from the floor.

name and pay a price that may well go up to Rs.50 crore according to some guesstimates. Those guessing at the low end of the scale say Rs.15 crore. Whatever the price, how can the Goenkas do it, wonders *The Man From Madras Musings*. The Spencer name is very much part of the Madras, even Chennai, tradition. And surely that tradition means something to the Goenkas?

In all the speculation about the name being put up for sale, the Goenkas offer the assurance that they "will make sure the name goes to the right quality company". They also say the name will live on in the holding company which runs FoodWorld, MusicWorld and Health and Glow and that Spencer Plaza will remain so. All that may be well and good, but can you imagine a 'Spencer's' product being manufactured without a Madras link? That's doing away with a hundred year and more history!

## In brief

★ Chandralekha's Raga was performed in Chennai recently to a full house invitation crowd and seemed to divide the house. The Bharata Natyam types sitting behind *The Man From Madras Musings* kept repeating often enough how "bored" they were. The less conventional crowd found the show exciting enough to discuss all evening long. The discussion centred on Chandralekha's avowal that the dance-drama was all about a "search for femininity". With the focus on two men in what they saw clearly was

the Forum. And, *The Man From Madras Musings* understands, he told them that Chernobyl occurred only because "they relaxed some of their safety standards". Though India was procuring its design from Russia, a Chernobyl could not happen here, he was confident, because India "has never compromised on safety" and because his team has "added fool-proof safety measures". MMM is not too hot on Indian safety standards in any field, but has no option but to go along with this promise. And so, all will be right with the world at Koodankulam, whatever the Doubting Thomases may say. Koodankulam, MMM learns, is very much part of Dr Chidambaram's dreams. "I have a dream," he is reported to have told the PR-persons. And that dream was that life expectancy should touch 80 in India. Energy consumption has a lot to do with reaching such marks... there is a definite indication that with growth of energy-consumption people live longer, he is said to have added. And so we will have Koodankulam.

★ Following on the Fourth Anglo Indian Reunion (an international get-together) held in Bangalore earlier this year, a quarterly called *Anglos in the Wind* was launched in Chennai in the middle of August. With a London-based publisher and a Chennai-based Editor, the journal aims to link Anglo-Indians spread far and wide, offering counselling, guidance and other help to the underprivileged among them. Editor Harry Maclure also told *The Man From Madras Musings* that he hoped to introduce a matrimonial column that would help the community to maintain its identity. Ann D'Monte, the nominated MLA, announced that a community centre and a vocational training centre were being developed in Perambur and a Home for the Aged is next on the agenda.

★ Stella Maris, *The Man From Madras Musings* notes from several reports, has started an eco-friendly environmental movement on campus. Apart from waste-bins using one-liners to attract attention — and use — instead of the traditional 'Use Me', the new Students' Union is drawing up plans for rain-harvesting, treating the water waste from the canteen, separating organic and non-biodegradable waste and generating a zero waste environment. Towards the last campaign, a 'Yuck' campaign has been started. And this has been explained as follows: "If you see someone doing something non-eco-friendly, say 'Yuck'... Everyone on campus knows that you're 'yucking' against the act and not the person." MMM is not very certain what the reaction has been to all the 'yucking', but hopes that the eco-friendly plans not only materialise but also don't stop with THIS Union. To ensure sustainability in the future is the biggest problem facing all such campaigns.

★ Dr R Chidambaram, Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission and described by the Public Sector PR Forum, Tamil Nadu, as "the wizard of the nuclear establishment" and "the captain of India's Nuke Guild", recently "had a tete-a-tete" with the Executive Committee members of

— MMM

## OUR READERS WRITE



### Crematoria for waste!

The Corporation Deputy Commissioner (Health) Dr. M Rajaram has to be congratulated on coming up with the idea of setting up an incinerator at the Kannamapet crematorium for hospital waste.

Instead of small hospitals and nursing homes disposing of their waste in incinerators installed in narrow and crowded streets and areas, thereby causing pollution, the Corporation, which has vast areas, has come up with a solution that will prevent much pollution.

This idea had been suggested by me to the then Asst. Health Officer, at Ayanavaram Division, Corporation of Madras years ago. I had pleaded that the Corporation install an incinerator at their New Avadi Road crematorium to reduce pollution instead of getting small nursing homes in and around Ayanavaram, Kilpauk, Annanagar, and Villivakkam to put their own incinerators in crowded places and thereby causing pollution.

When the Corporation of Salem and Tiruchi can have one incinerator, why not Chennai two?

Dr. K Gandhiraj,  
10, MTH Road,  
Villivakkam,  
Chennai 600 049.

### IITian arrogance

Anil Agarwal, an alumnus of one of the IITs, has indeed done a service to the academic environment, by stating correctly the failings of the IITs (MM, August 16th).

I found it a joy to teach in an IIT to boys well-mannered and polite in class. But a hard-working and committed teacher gets nothing professionally in return, purely because of the conceit of students that is un-paralleled. And it is a fact the IIT teachers (including the Directors), do little to temper this arrogance.

In the world-famed I.I.Sc, Bangalore, where I did my engineering course, the batch of thirty students admitted were A-1, each topping the Universities in their area. I never experienced a shade of this culture that is characteristic of I.I.T.

R.B. Nair, Ph. D (Cantab) echoes the same: "a ruthless competitiveness, an annoying complacency, ... a distinct tendency to be selfish, but that he sees such selfishness as essential to success" (Technocrat, Harpercollins India, 1997). This is the culture referred to in the article.

It is a proven fact that "few IIT Directors know any thing about financial management", proclaimed the Centre for Rural Development; which failed 15 years ago. No corrective active could ever work till today nor anything launched in that direction.

Prof. R. Parthasarathy  
(Former Professor, IIT)  
Plot 42, Heverlee  
Velachery, Chennai 600 036.

### One for the road!

Coaxing people to invest in Small Savings, the Commissioner of Small Savings, Tamil Nadu, has stated in his recent advertisement that "You don't have to be an engineer to build roads in Tamil Nadu", obliquely meaning that the savings thus effected would go into the construction of roads.

True, the condition of city roads, rain or shine, would reveal anything but engineering skill!

P.G. Menon  
6, 12th Street, Nandanam Extn.  
Chennai 600 035.

### Profound blunders

How a wrong picture of Mathematician S. Ramanujan had been published (MM, August 1) reminded me of my own experience nearly two decades ago when I was teaching.

Once happened to meet the Director of the Ramanujan Institute of Mathematics, University of Madras, and asked him if any of his students or staff were working on any of the problems of Ramanujan. The answer was an emphatic 'No!' (The Ramanujan Centenary was still far away.) I ventured to wonder about whether in an Institute named after him, should there not be someone working on the many problems posed by that great man? I was informed — I am not a mathematician, but a statistician — that Ramanujan's works were mostly of the 'classical' type and not modern enough for Doctorate students to work on! I was rather taken aback, since I had all along been imagining that Ramanujan was really one of the greatest mathematicians produced by our country, past and present. The tale does not end there. Some years later, I happened to be watching a TV programme on Ramanujan (his centenary year being celebrated) and what did I see!

The director whom I had mentioned before, was on the screen extolling the great modern mathematical genius of Ramanujan! There was a foreign mathematician also present on the occasion. So, it is not only journalists who blunder. There can be "profound" blunders too!

KR Rajagopalan  
B/2/3, 13th Cross,  
Besant Nagar,  
Chennai 600 090.

### Learn from Calcutta

Further to my letter published in MM, August 16th, Chennai might be interested in learning that there is a vigorous and determined effort on the part of the authorities to clear the footpaths of Calcutta City and rehabilitate the hawkers. The problem had reached such an alarming situation, because it was not tackled at the beginning, that the Government had to step in with stringent measures to clear the footpaths. The results are there for everyone to see. Not only the footpaths are now free for use by

# The money for Senate House

I would like to clarify the issues raised by *Madras Musings* (August 1) regarding the funds so far collected specifically for the purpose of renovation of Senate House. A sum of Rs. 25,62,888.50 was collected during the period of Prof. S. Sathikh, my predecessor. However, it seems in the figure given by him, i.e. Rs. 1.2 crore, he might have taken into account the fee of Rs. 20 (now Rs. 25) collected from each student admitted to a course of study in a college or the University towards the development of infrastructure. This infrastructure fee is kept in a separate account and is used not only for the creation of new infrastructure but also maintaining the existing infrastructure spread over five campuses.

During my Vice-Chancellorship beginning November 1997, a sum of Rs. 13,52,939 has been collected till date, besides interest accrued on deposits and the U.G.C. grant of Rs. 10 lakh of

which already Rs. 2.5 lakh have been received.

Along with the interest accrued minus the money spent on Phase I for removal of plant growth etc., the present balance is Rs. 38,28,502.

Thus, the funds collected have certainly not vanished in the University's cash flow; whatever is collected by way of funds towards the renovation of the Senate House will be used only for this specific purpose and not for any other.

The Senate House after renovation will be made into a first class Convention Hall open to public organisations in addition to holding Convocations of the University in that hall as was the practice in the glorious past. The affiliated colleges will also be encouraged to hold their Convocations in this hall for the benefit of the students of the respective colleges.

Efforts are on to get funds from the alumni, public and

other concerned organisations. We are certain to renovate this monumental Senate House at the earliest.

P.T. Manoharan  
Vice-Chancellor,  
University of Madras,  
Chepauk,  
Chennai 600 005.

Editor's Note: The Vice Chancellor's clarification and Prof Sathikh's clarification (MM, September 1) certainly shed light on the money collected for the restoration of Senate House. They only differ in perspective on the amount collected for "development of infrastructure". There will no doubt continue to be differing views on that — and ours is that it has gone into the University's cash flow.

Be that as it may, we welcome Professor Manoharan's enthusiasm and look forward not only to convocations being once again held there but to his occupying office there as well.

pedestrians, but even the roads can now be widened in many places enabling better flow of traffic. Let us hope the authorities in Chennai will not wait for the situation to become unbearable before they act.

K. Kochunny,  
'Sai Krupa', Pearson Palit (N),  
(Near Deer Park),  
Santi Niketan 731 235.

### Talented twaker

Murali Karthik has come to stay in Indian cricket, if proper encouragement is given to him at the appropriate time. But Delhi is not the place for this Railways cricketer to come up in cricket. He needs coaching under Venkat, VV Kumar and Vasudevan. C.K. Suresh from Railways could not come to the top despite doing well as a left-arm spinner in Delhi. Karthik should return to South for better prospects.

C.P. Krishnan  
A-92, Ashok Nagar,  
'Sai Sadan',  
Ghaziabad (UP)

### Confusing birthdays

There seems to be some confusion regarding birthdays and anniversaries. Some Shashitabdapuri invitations refer to the event as the 61st birthday of the individual. Some people think August 15, 1997 is the 51st Independence Day of our country. (When I was a schoolboy, a classmate taught me how to interpret my age 'correctly'. I then realised I was a year older than what I had erroneously believed. I was thrilled. According to his logic, the day a child is born, it is one year old. After 365 days, it is two years old and so on. This came to my mind when I pondered over the confusion mentioned above).

The day a child is born is certainly not its birthday. It's the day of its birth. There is a difference between the two. When a child is

born, the family does not celebrate its birthday. They celebrate (rejoice is perhaps the appropriate word) its birth. The first birthday comes a year later. On August 15, 1947, we certainly did not celebrate Independence Day. We celebrated independence.

Incidentally, Shashitabdapuri is a Sanskrit 'compound word' consisting of three words. Shasti + abda + purthi or sixty + year + completion, meaning the comple-

B. Gautham  
122 Wallajah Road  
Chennai 600 002.

### Tourism vs Sanctity

Any attempt to make sacred Rameswaram a tourist centre cannot be tolerated. Tourism actually ends in accumulation of environmental pollution besides moral pollution and loss of sanctity of sacred areas near the destination.

The island of Rameswaram has more than 50 sq.km of land besides some islets. If the government wants a health resort cum tourist centre it can embark on this venture at least 5 km. from the vicinity of the sacred Ramalingeswara Swamy Temple.

S.P. Segaram  
4/136 II Cross Street,  
Rajeshwary Nagar  
Porur,  
Chennai 116.

### Corporation & Exnora

When the Corporation/Municipal Elections were not held for two decades, Exnora was born, getting society to help itself. The idea spread but the concept was diluted later. I speak from first hand experience as a past Vice-President of my area's Exnora. Exnora did try hard to keep a locality clean.

But after the civic elections, and the Mayor and the Councillors took their appointed place, the areas which Exnora helped to clean and

other areas have become nobody's baby. In Leith Castle Street, neither the Corporation clears the garbage, nor Exnora and the public is the sufferer.

Where do both go from here?

M. Fazal  
Flat No.1, Seaview Apartments,  
16, Leith Castle Road,  
Santhome,  
Chennai 600 028.

### Support wanted

'Senior Citizens Forum' of Kilpauk, a group of elders, has been actively involved in service activities for more than a year. We would like to take up "A drive for efficiency", a programme to include other public services in Kilpauk. Would other citizens in Kilpauk please come forward to supplement and widen our services?

Interested persons may contact Mr. C.S.S. Setty on phone (No. 614522) or by letter to the address below.

C.S.S. Setty  
18 Agasthiya Nagar,  
Halls Road, Kilpauk,  
Chennai 600 010.

### Chromepet needs...

Chromepet, an important suburb of South Chennai, needs: — A branch of the State Bank of India.

— A direct bus service between Tambaram and West Mambalam (Ayodhya Mandapam area) via Saidapet or Ashok Pillar.

— Extension of the Railways pedestrian overbridge across the G.S.T. Road with a staircase near the post office, as available at Egmore.

All this will help thousands in this busy, fast-growing suburb.

K. Sundara Raman  
5, K.V. Apartments,  
101, G.S.T. Road,  
Chromepet,  
Chennai 600 044.

# City of Grace

No city can be given an identity which encompasses all its characteristics, moods and facets. But, finally, a residual impression remains, a sort of final echo, an abiding memory after the clamour and confusion of several departures. Madras, by whatever name it is now called, stays in the mind as an essentially civilised city.

When the images of the giant cut-outs of several leaders, and the restless, swelling crowds milling around them, the roar of the roads clogged with a bewildering variety of vehicles and the rank odour of the sludge filled rivers finally recede, then that is what one remembers. The memories of gentleness in discourse; the odd, and not infrequent, examples of neighbourliness; the passing goodwill of strangers on the road.

Perhaps one cannot be totally objective, even though one is now only an occasional visitor, and over the decades the city has changed greatly, though not as much as the capital, Delhi. For this was the city in which one was a child, and one's world was filled with wonder as well as with delight.

Wonder at the old trams, grinding slowly from Luz to Mount Road; at the passing crowds liberally sprinkled with red-faced 'Tommies', in khaki shorts and tunics, and a vivid recollection of what must have been a brush with death, when a jeep came to a halt with squealing tyres inches from where I had fallen on San Thomé High Road, and four red-faced Tommies picked me up, inspected me the right way up, sideways and upside down, then set me on the pavement saying, "No harm done. He's in one piece."

Delight in walking and running down a quiet Marina along which only a handful of people strolled in the evenings, in rolling down the small sand slopes which led from our house to the sea, and in the incessant sound of the waves breaking on the shore, the sound with which we drifted into sleep at night, and with which we woke every morning.

But these are a part of the box of magic which contains every person's childhood, and can, at best, colour only a small portion of one's response to a great metropolis many decades later. Because cities change, often out of all recognition, Madras has, arguably, changed the least, but even so, there is little of the old Mount Road left; Mylapore is no longer the quiet, almost sleepy corner of the city it once was. What is of more relevance today

is the kind of people one meets, for ultimately it is the nature of social intercourse and relationships that constitute that identity of the city which one comes to believe is its only identity.

One is, of course, completely wrong, for this city is, like other cities, all things to all men. Nonetheless, it is a real identity, even though it is one among many. And that is why even today this

● by Bhaskar Ghose

remains perhaps the last of our civilised cities.

This is a city which like few others has firm links with the richness of its past heritage and with its immensely exciting future, and is able to meld the two into something which is not either grotesque or synthetic.

The grace and beauty of its traditions of dance and music are wonderfully and not inappropriately one with the new industrial ventures which are growing around the city. The citizens of Madras have found the formula which makes them comfortable with both.

True it has all the problems of a metropolis; slums, too much traffic on roads not able to take the load, water shortages, and occasional power breakdowns. One would like to think of these as

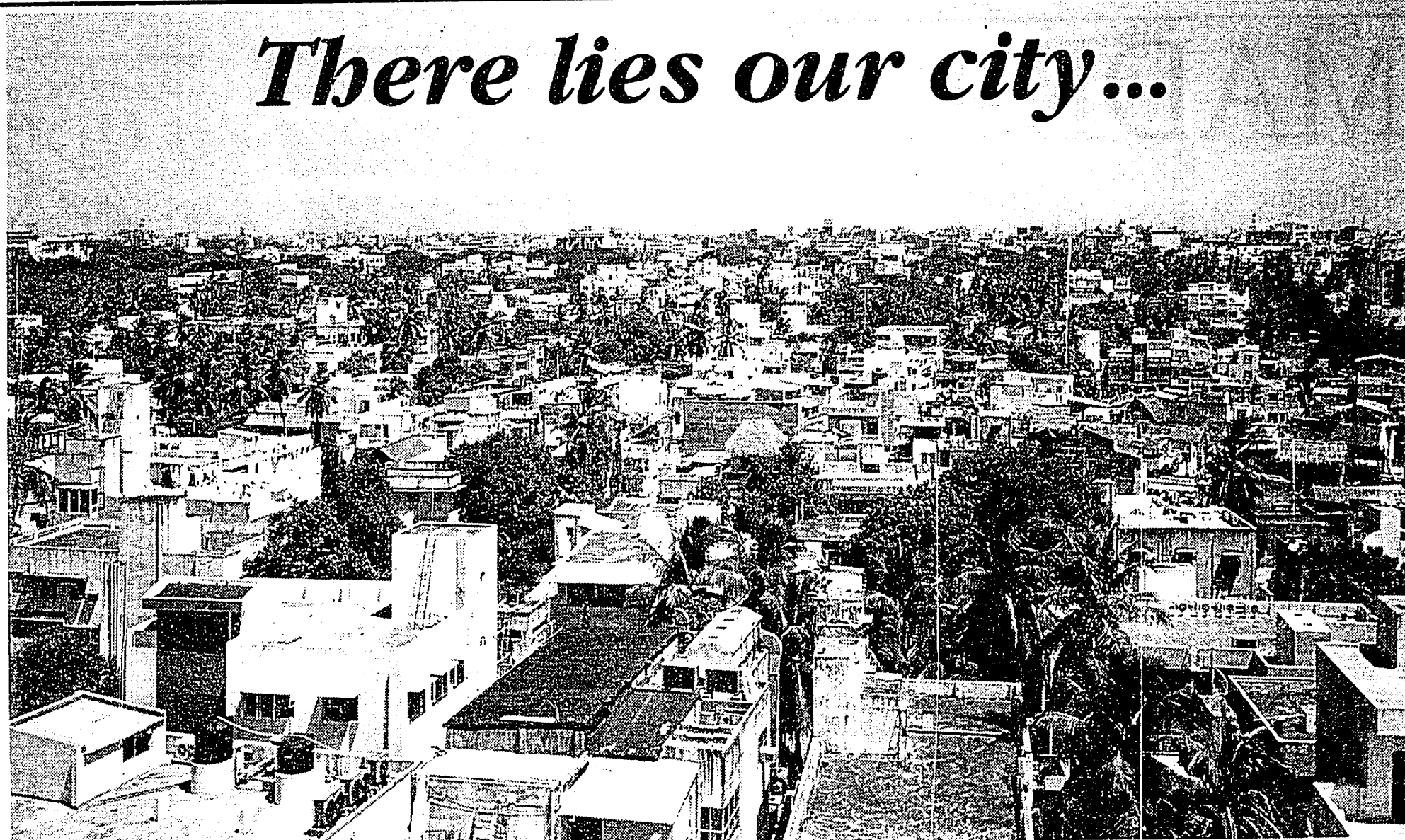
symptoms of a growing city; growth is often not a very pleasant thing, even though it is often inevitable, and usually desirable. Consequently, there is the hope that time will mean an ability to cope with these distressing symptoms of change.

There is, however, one which cries out for immediate action, and this is what has happened to the Cooum and Adyar rivers. Once they were waterways beside which one could walk in the evenings or early mornings, and clear rivers are always, as these once were, ribbons of tranquillity in the tumult of a city. But first the Cooum, and later, sadly, the Adyar, have become little more than drains.

The fetid stench of raw sewage hangs heavy over them and their immediate environs, and intrudes more and more into the images of the fine metropolis that Madras still is. There is concern, alarm and even anger in the city, but these must translate into determined action.

Is one being too fanciful in imagining that finally all of those will give way to the abiding image of the city one carries, of gentle warmth, a courtesy which is correct, if sometimes a little formal, and of a sensitivity to the arts? Looking back over four decades, one feels not.

## There lies our city...



## ...Dare we dream of a better tomorrow for it?

In the 18th Century, only three per cent of the world's population lived in cities. By the year 2000, more than 50 per cent will be living in urban areas. By 2025, two-thirds of the world's population will be city dwellers.

Why do people live in or migrate to cities? For the majority of people, the city is where they can find gainful employment. With technological advances in

agriculture, the number of persons required in this sector has reduced, and in developing countries, this has been the major cause of migration from rural

areas. Other reasons for urban migration are education, healthcare, availability of water supply and sanitation and, more frequently than is imagined, en-

vironmental degradation.

tainment. The 'bright lights' of cities beckon with a fascination that is hard to resist!

Globalisation with its present economic connotation has resulted in cities undergoing tremendous changes. But globalisation's positive effects on economic growth and social development are counterbalanced by the negative ones — it has encouraged migration to urban areas, hastened infrastructure deterioration and placed a strain on the grossly inadequate social services and, in many countries, increased the existing inequalities between rich and poor. Urban management systems have failed to keep pace with the needs of the expanding city.

Globalisation is a phenomenon driven by private enterprise. Because of the flexibility to conduct its activities from almost any city of its choice, private enterprise today selects the locations based purely on economic considerations. These locations may be anywhere in the world and are often to be found where they are given the best tax advantages. Unfortunately, governments do not get enough of a monetary return and are increasingly impoverished and sidelined. The problems of urbanisation caused by this phenomenon have however to be tackled by the very same government — problems such as that of lack of housing, increased demand on infrastructure, poverty, crime, traffic, drugs and environmental degradation.

## THE REASONS WHY...

There are several reasons for the condition we find ourselves in, for the mess most Indian cities are today and most of them are to do with the way urban planners plan. These reasons, mainly based on my observation of Chennai, are:

- There is no link to the existing and often old settlements and the proposed plans.
- Many of the plans are mere knee-jerk reactions to current problems and have nothing to do with planning. There is often no vision and no direction.
- There seems to be no commitment to the proposed aspects of the plans either from the governments or from other agencies involved in the execution of these plans.
- The plans exhibit no sensibility and no thought to the needs of the end user. It is as if mere increase in numbers will solve problems.
- No attempts are made to study past failures to correct future situations nor are links and priorities established between the various facets of urban development.
- There is no identification of the critical areas requiring intervention, only mere suggestions in all areas.
- The proposed plans are often grandiose and expensive — quite in contrast to the funds available.
- While earlier plans have been rigid and therefore cannot cater to changing situations, the lax planning approach of today without adequate enforcement support is a sure indicator for failure.
- There is no upgradation of skills and facilities required to manage a city.
- And finally, there is little or no transparency and accountability in the functioning of the urban management systems.

This issue was addressed by a leading corporate magnate in a recent article in *The Times of India*. He felt that a development activity serving community interests must form part of any responsible corporate structure and that sufficient funding for this must come from the corporates themselves.

The paradox of urbanisation lies in the rigid divisions that create two parallel circuits of the rich and the poor. While many cities of both the developed and developing countries provide all amenities that are required for the rich, the poor have to fight for survival literally and physically. Luxury and cleanliness with greater attention and assistance from government agencies are apparent in one area, while the other is denied even the basic necessities of clean drinking water and hygienic surroundings.

Cities have advantages, not often recognised, in both environment and development spheres. Urban settlements with high density in a limited area destroy less of the natural habitat than sprawling suburban settlement patterns. They facilitate the provision of mass transportation, clean water, sanitation, electricity, health services and education.

Contrary to common perceptions, studies preparatory to the UN Habitat II Conference, found that the higher the level of urbanisation, the lower the level of absolute poverty and that greater economic growth has often taken place with rapid urbanisation. The most urbanised nations are also those with the highest life expectancy, and those who live or move to cities generally have smaller families. Funnily, the largeness of size

of the problems of cities has itself been instrumental in finding remedies and solutions. Because of the large quantities of paper and plastic waste, because of the large quantity of water waste, recycling is an economically viable option. Because of the volume of commuters, public transport is economically viable and because of the limited area and consequent decrease in the length of roads, water lines, drainage lines, etc., to be provided, there is a reduction in costs compared to suburban type developments.

Cities are expressions of the dynamism of the human spirit — the centres of culture, creativity and the interchange of ideas. Urbanisation has helped to establish and strengthen improvements in living standards for a considerable proportion of the world's population. Cities and towns also have important roles in social transformation and in the breakdown of feudal systems and values. They are centres of artistic and scientific innovation, and of culture and education. In general, the history of cities is therefore inextricably linked to that of civilisation.

But cities also emphasise the extremes of wealth and poverty and take a disproportionate toll of the life support systems of the planet. Cities confront increasing violence, mental illness and the disintegration of communities and with that the disintegration of accepted social norms and practices. To resolve this contradiction is the urban challenge.

Management of cities by governments in India has traditionally been in the areas of funding, infrastructure, urban planning and in affordable housing. In the

(Continued on Page 6)

## Will someone rescue Ripon Building?

I have always held that one of the most beautiful sights in Madras that is Chennai is seeing the Ripon Building at night; under the lights, snow-white slender columns look so beautiful and the whole building has such a majesty about it. So you can imagine how aghast I was, when one day ago, as we drove past to the station, at night, I saw the building look like it had come back after a terrible dhoobi-wash; literally as if a bit of it have been dipped in washing blue! (Obviously somebody has tried giving it a new coat of paint — choosing an utterly wrong shade of white (if there are shade to white!) Some of the pillars retain the original snow white look; the rest look an ugly blue-white or is it grey-white? Positively ugly. I never realised I could be so attached to something as inanimate or unrelated as Ripon Building; but I found myself gasp in horror and anger, patriotic,

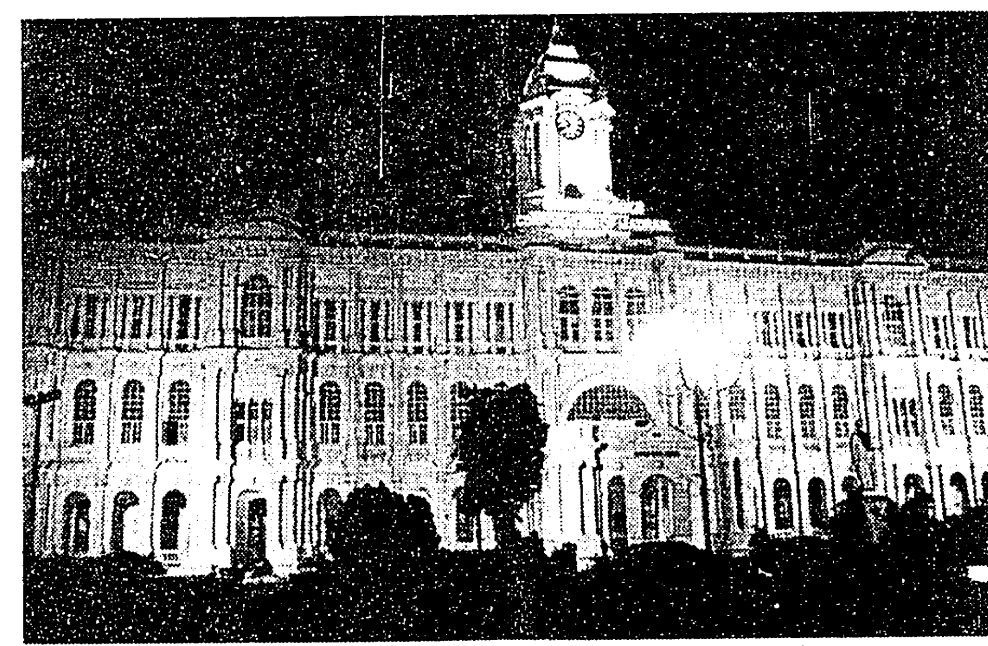
city-loving citizen of Chennai that I am. That's when I decided I must write to MM about it. After all, *Valluvar Kottam* had been resurrected by the powers that be a few years ago, after I wrote a sort of an epitaph for it, seeing its sorry state, in MM. So I guess there is hope for dear *Ripon Building*.

While pointing out faults, let us also give credit where it is due. To the Southern Railways, for instance, who have most imaginatively done the extension work at Madras Central. The architect has retained the same familiar design for the frontage of the extension; so Madras Central continues to have the same old familiar, friendly, distinguished look. Landmarks shouldn't be tampered with; the Railways ARE learning. I guess they are trying to make up for that yesteryear gaffe, when they put up that concrete monstrosity where Moore Market, beloved to

all Madras, used to be. Ah! Moore Market! Let us observe a moment of silence, readers, for that oasis of life, joy and many splendoured fun that Moore Market was! Oh, for those second hand bookstalls! Oh, for those lovely arches and railings and the age-old red sandstones! Madras lost a bit of her heart with the loss of Moore Market; Madras lives on, sighing once in a way, like a mother who was lost a child. Not a million 'utility buildings' can make good that loss. But who cares?!

A few days ago I was at Hyderabad. Compared to Chennai, it seemed so much cleaner. Even the streets of old Hyderabad were much cleaner than our roads; no piles of rubbish lying uncleared. Perhaps we should send our city-fathers on a trip to Hyderabad; to learn how to operate an effective, efficient, clean-up system.

Salar Jung Museum com-



The Ripon Building by night looks much better than by day.

pleted the contrast. Here, in Chennai, you drive into the Museum grounds to be greeted by mounds of rubbish and bits of paper all over. The ancient canons of Seringapatam lie amid weeds and graffiti. And to park amid the garbage piles, the private contractor charges you Rs. 5! The Museum itself is so badly lit, musty and dusty; and the floors seem to have layers of dirt dating back to the 19th Century origins of the building.

In contrast, Salar Jung was such a refreshing experience. The place was spick and span; well lit, the artefacts tastefully illuminated. Chairs outside each room enabled visitors to stretch out their tired legs and fans made sure one had a nice cool

breeze. Thirsty? Cold, aquaguarded water was available for visitors. The contents of each room were listed on billboards and the whole place was so well sign posted, you could pick your area of interest and spend time. Inside, the artefacts were well cared for too. Museum personnel ensured that the no-touch rule was followed; no chance for vandalism or theft. In Chennai, the security is abysmal; one could walk out with a Sixth Century piece and no one would be any the wiser. The Salar Jung charges an admission fee of Rs. 3 for children and Rs. 6 for adults; no one grudges them that for the service they provide is excellent.

At Salar Jung, free parking

## Hiramalini Seshadri looks at a city losing its lustre

facilities are available at the rear of the building. The grounds are being developed into lovely gardens. We have a lot of land around our museum. The trees — they are God's own gift — have survived despite the government. Why not turn the land around into lawns and gardens? The grounds — there is so much of them — could be handed over to the Government Horticulture Department in case we have qualms about asking private concerns to do the job.

Another sight for sore eyes is our Madras skyline of hoardings. I was delighted when the Corporation started blacking out many of them. I thought hoardings were on their way out; but I was mistaken; the operation black-out was only because the hoarders (shall we call them that?) hadn't paid their dues! I wish we could have a law against hoardings. Recently I was in Bangkok. They simply do not allow hoardings there. It was so heartening to see that even film posters were not allowed to spoil the city's looks. I guess we need someone

like H.H. Bhumiopol here; someone who truly loves the city.

Mind you, Bangkok is as third worldly as you can get; and if they can get by without hoardings, surely we in Chennai can. George Fernandes was right when he banned Coke. See what has happened now. Not only are our children growing up addicted to the fizzy drinks, but a virtual visual invasion of the subcontinent has taken place. Turn ANYWHERE and Coke and Pepsi ads stare back at you; from billboards to small shop boards to tea-shack boards. All activity on Indian roads seems to be done under the watchful eye of Coke and Pepsi! In Bangkok, too, there are Coke and Pepsi; but you do NOT find hoardings. Sell your stuff if you want, but no defiling our city, Sir, is the message. We could learn a lesson from the self-respecting Thais.

To get back to what started me on this article — beloved *Ripon Building* that is reeling under that awful coat of paint. Will someone please rescue *Ripon Building*?

# FUTURE SHOCK, MADRAS

Ten years ago I was in Madras, today I'm in Chennai. Things have changed quite a lot. We are no longer conservative. Pizza was unheard of, now it's in. I predict more sweeping changes in the future in every sphere of life in Chennai. Ten years from now, say in 2008 A.D., the scenario in Chennai will be like this.

## The roads

- \* Due to heavy traffic congestion, most roads will be declared one-way. If you want to go to locality in the neighbourhood, just one kilometre away, you may have to travel one hour in traffic and 6 km by road. For instance, if you are in Adyar and want to go to Mylapore, your route will be via Tiruvanniyur, Velachery and Saidapet. And one-way, please.
- \* There won't be any straight roads. All roads will be like the present Arcot Road, full of loops.
- \* All roads will have two names,

but everyone will be using only the old name.

- \* Mount Road can be accessed only by special card (to be hung around the neck on a chain) and the speed near Thousand Lights will be 300 mm per hour.
- \* To go to Marina beach, you will have to book three months in advance with the police for a place on the beach.
- \* There will be an elevated road, either over Mount Road or Beach Road, but it will be for the exclusive purpose of 'processionists' and will be booked on an hourly basis.

## The traffic

- \* Environmentalists will declare Parrys a danger zone. Only people with specially-made masks will be allowed to enter.
- \* Some schools and colleges will open at 3 a.m. to avoid peak-hour traffic and close at 9 a.m.
- \* People who drive Maruti cars will be looked down upon, like we do now at those who drive Lambretta scooters.

## Food

- \* There will be more Pizza 'hotels' than idli-vadai 'hotels'. Coca-Cola and Pepsi will supply their fizzy drinks through pipe-lines.
- \* Marriage functions will last for an hour at the most. Some of the big kalyana mandapams will install conveyor-tracks to move people to greet the newly wedded couple. The dining halls will also have a

● by  
**N. Sreenivasu**

conveyor system for food. You will have to be smart enough and fast enough to grab all the items within a given time. For those who don't have the time for dinner at the venue, they can get a packed-dinner by handing in at a parcel counter a coupon. The coupon will be given to you at the gifts counter when you deposit your gift.

## Entertainment

- \* There will be a minimum 100 TV channels and many sponsored programmes such as "Selvam Panneer Soda Ungal Choice". News programmes every five minutes which report the number of dogs, cats, flies killed in various accidents.
- \* The Carnatic music programmes at Sabhas will last for half-an-hour at the most, because of the high cost of tickets. If you want to see an Indo-Pakistan cricket match at Chidambaram Stadium, you will have to sell your flat to purchase one ticket. Visa-card holders will get a concession if they sell their plots also.
- \* There will be half-a-dozen theatres left in the city. In place of the other theatres, there will be skyscrapers.

## We the People

- \* People will meet each other only during functions and

even if you want to meet your father or son, you will need to get an appointment.

- \* There will be 'discount sales' throughout the year in Pondy Bazaar, a road which will be for 'pedestrians only'.
- \* For jogging on the road, you will be required to pay a fee, but if you are jogging to keep fit while standing in a queue for your children's school admission, then you will be given a 50% concession on the fee.
- \* Environmentalists will demand that Government shift the congested and dirty Koyambedu market to Thiruvallur.
- \* Cut-outs of political leaders will be still seen, just with 3-D effects.
- \* The Hindu will have a separate classified column for divorce announcements.
- \* Parents will advise their teenage sons not to walk alone near women's colleges to save them from 'Adam-teasing'.

(Continued from Page 4)

last decade, there has been a change in the approach in each of these areas.

Governments earlier used to tax and levy charges to meet the expenditure on various projects. Today, to meet the shortfall between the taxes raised and the expenses, new administered charges for scrutiny of plans, development charges and cost of connections, are being levied and routinely increased. Governments are also borrowing heavily from international agencies to match the pace of infrastructure development.

In the area of infrastructure, provision of roads, water supply and sewage treatment, the current approach is to hand it over to the private sector for BOT — build-operate-transfer. In areas of garbage, the move is to either shift responsibility or action to NGOs or to privatise the collection of garbage.

In the sphere of urban planning, government is changing from the comprehensive but rigid approach found in earlier plans to one of merely identifying the extent of urban land and then leaving it to what it euphemistically calls 'organic development'.

Affordable housing or providing housing for weaker sections was once considered the sole responsibility of the government. Today, the buzzword is 'enabling' and playing the role of a facilitator. This means that the actual construction of houses be done by the private sector under the supervision of the government agencies.

It is a moot point whether these changes, in the long run, will impact the urbanisation process in a beneficial manner. The concept of a 'sustain-

# A better tomorrow for cities?

able city' implies that each city must meet the needs of its population and local enterprise from within its own area and immediate surroundings. This means as far as possible all materials required for the city's development come from within its own area and all the waste that it generates must also be dumped and treated within its own area. Not a very new statement since Mahatma Gandhi propagated this very concept many years ago! In the changing global world of today where materials are transported and made available across the globe, this perhaps questions the fundamental activity of international trade.

The concept of sustainable development and sustainable cities is perhaps expressed best by examples of what it is not.

The concept of sustainable development is not just frustrated but defeated when lack of, or skewed city planning results in the astronomical price rise of urban land, pushing poorer people to far off, unhygienic, and degraded areas. Such a move as we know, results in the giving up of those uninhabitable areas and return to illegal occupation and generally the creation of other slums in the city!

The concept of a sustainable city is hindered and has almost irreparable repercussions when a traffic policy taking into

consideration the best transport methods to provide easy and safe transport for the majority of its citizens is either unavailable or inadequate, when the rights of cyclists and pedestrians are ignored and their lives endangered and further thwarted when cars and two-wheelers spew their toxic emissions into the air and the effects are felt by all.

The concept of a sustainable city is defeated when commercial establishments do not provide adequate parking within their own sites but take over and exploit the common property, our roads.

And so on and on...

In the success of Curitiba in Brazil, despite growing from 2,00,000 citizens in 1950 to 2.1 million people in 1990, lies the answer to the question, "Is sustainable development possible?"

One of Curitiba's first successes was in controlling the persistent flooding that plagued the city centre. As early as 1966, strips of land were set aside for drainage and no construction was permitted in low-lying areas. Legislation was enacted to protect the remaining natural drainage system. Riverbanks were converted into parks, and disused factories and other buildings on the banks into sports and leisure facilities. Buses and bicycle

paths integrate the parks to the rest of the city. Contrast this with the lining of the Cooum in concrete in the 60's and building the MRTS over the Buckingham Canal in the 80s and 90s!

Right at the beginning, the movement of traffic was kept relatively free by not concentrating the business district in the centre of the city, but by encouraging growth along five prescribed axes. Each of the axis has three parallel roadways. The centre road contains two express bus lanes and is flanked on either side by local roads — similar to the Gandhinagar — Katurbanagar development in the 50s. One block away are one way streets to which traffic moves in from the sides. Land use legislation has allowed for high-density growth along the axes. If Curitiba today is free of the traffic jams that mark other cities of the world, this early road networking system has contributed to it in no small measure.

The priority to public transportation is one of the critical factors that has ensured Curitiba's success. Right from the beginning, public transport in the form of buses was decided as the best transportation. In fact the mass rapid transport systems were studied and discarded as not being suitable in terms of money, space and time. They were also found

more expensive to maintain. Busways were also less technologically intensive in construction and maintenance.

Coupled with pedestrian walkways and bicycle lanes, the city's bus service has successfully stood the test of time.

Soild waste management is tackled at both generation and collection ends. The equivalent of 1200 trees is recycled in paper each day! The Garbage Purchase Programme, designed specially for low-income areas, helps clean up sites that are difficult for conventional systems to serve. Poor families can exchange garbage filled bags for bus tokens, food parcels, and children's school notebooks.

In whichever direction the city may choose to evolve, the one critical underlying factor will be that of environment and to complement it will have to be social development. The wheel which appears to turn actually stays firm around the concept of sustainable development.

I do not want to hazard a guess on the future of cities but I know what I would like cities of the future to be. I merely quote Dr. Wally N'Dow, chairman of the UN Conference on Human Settlements. "A city without fear, a city whose streets can be walked freely by all, young and old, a city where landscapes offer relief from concrete and asphalt, a city with no homeless people, a city where water is available to all, rich and poor alike, a city where creativity and innovation flourish and where every citizen is allowed to exercise his or her rights freely." And to echo something familiar to us all, "Into that heaven, let me awake".

They were also found

## Another heritage building to get a ...

# New lease of life

Work on restoring another heritage building in Chennai will commence this month. Plans have been drawn up by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) to renovate and restore the old Connemara Public library building at a cost of Rs. 49.2 lakh. The Department of Culture, Government of India, will contribute Rs. 32.8 lakh and the State Government Rs. 16.4 lakh. The ASI will complete the work by the millennium.

Speaking to Madras Musings, K.T. Narasimhan, Superintending Archaeologist Southern Circle, said a three-month study had been undertaken to document the details and finer aspects of this magnificent building. It was found

ernor of Madras during 1886-1890, outlined the objectives of the library and laid the foundation stone on March 22, 1890. The library, when formally opened on December 5, 1896 was named after him by Sir Arthur Havelock, the Governor of Madras, who observed, "We have a magnificent hall, a splendid reading room and beautiful book shelves; but I regret to say the book shelves are at present poorly furnished. They contain a useful reference and scientific library which has been transferred from the old Museum library; also documents and other papers which have been presented by the Secretariat; but beyond this, I believe, the shelves are empty."

● by Rajind N Christy

that the structure is still strong, but providing new drainage and leak proofing of the roof are necessary to ensure model preservation. The library is sited on a low-lying area and during the monsoon witnesses water-logging. New drainage is essential.

Henry Irwin, the consulting architect for the Government of Madras in the 1890s built this imposing structure and gave it a spacious and ornately decorated reading room. Today, the hall stores the Library's ancient books collection and none is allowed in. The library's rare books include, *The Bible* published in 1608; *Hortus Indicus Malabaricus* 12 volumes by Rheed etc, 1678-1703; *A Voyage to Surat in the Year 1689* by Ovington (J) 1696; *An Account of the Trade in India* by Lockyer (Charles); *An Account of the Religion and Government, Learning and Economy, etc. of the Malabarians - 1717*, and *Flora Indica* by Burmanni (Nicolai Laverentil) - 1768.

Today much of the stained glass windows are covered with weather-proofing sheets, which has made the magnificent reading hall a dungeon.

Steps will be taken to restore the old glory, say the ASI officials. The flooring of the library was paved with the slabs brought from the Krishna District by boats using the Buckingham Canal. The flooring will be restored, ASI officials promise.

Lord Connemara, the Gov-

koti Mudaliar made a donation of Rs. 20,000 to the Victoria Memorial for the purchase of books on art to be added to the collection. The Madras Literary Society library functioned in the southern half of the long hall until it was shifted to the present building in College Road in 1905. The Madras University Library functioned here till 1928 when it moved to its present home on the University Campus at Chepauk.

The first full-time librarian was R Janardhanam Naidu. The library staff was separated from the Museum staff in 1930 and, in 1939, the library became an independent government institution. In 1950 it became the State Central Library under the Directorate of Public Instruction. It was declared a UNESCO Associated Library in 1955 and became a depository for publications of the United Nations Organisations. It was also declared in 1955 as one of the three public libraries in India to get a copy of all materials published in India under the Delivery of Books Act of 1954. The library became a UNESCO information centre in 1965. An Institute of Library Science was added in 1966 to train librarians working under the local library authorities in the state. An additional block was constructed in 1974 at a cost of Rs. 12.71 lakh. This is now used as the main library serving 65,000 members.

The books were classified in 1928. The open access system

## THE OLD...

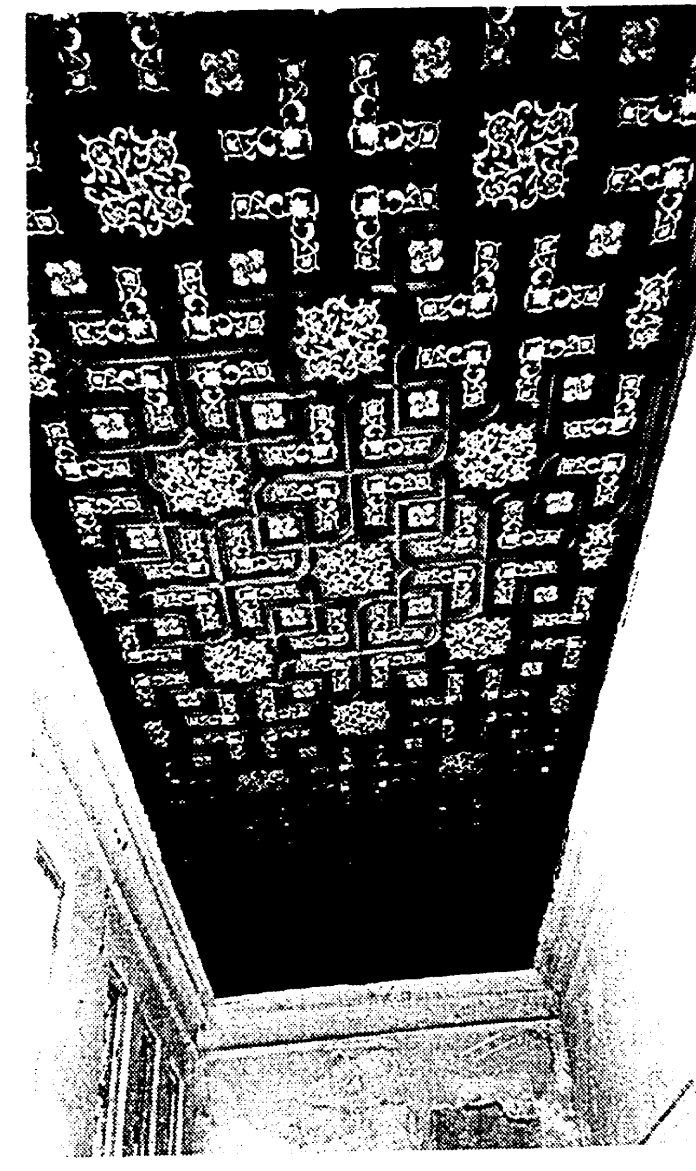
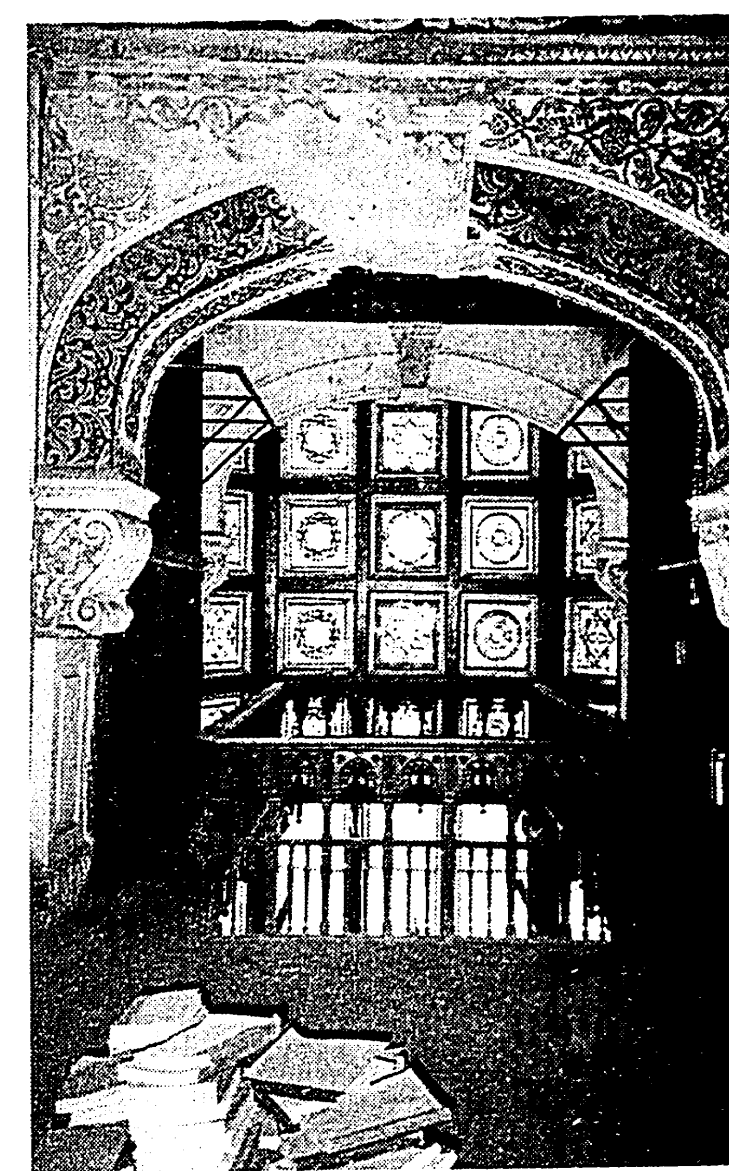
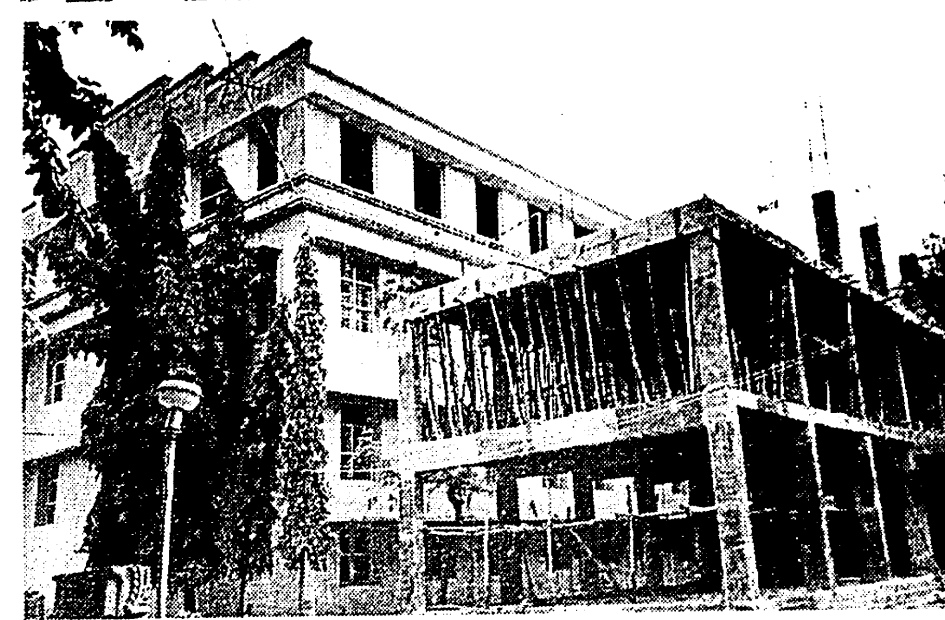
## ...& THE NEW

Our OLD is of the Connemara Library which is due to get a new lease of life after restoration by the Archaeological Survey of India. Our NEW is of a portion of the unimaginative 'T' block built in 1974 as part of expansion work. Fortunately, this strictly functional building is hidden behind trees and is not easily seen as the eyesore it is, but that is no reason why the building under construction was laid for the newest building in the Pantheon Road complex, promises were made that the building would merge well with Irwin's. We look forward to that promise being kept.

The best part of the OLD is the splendid first floor reading room and the stairway that leads upto its past stained glass windows. RAJIND N. CHRISTY'S pictures show the OLD and the NEW and below the NEW the splendid reading room with its ornate ceiling, its stained glass windows that join ceiling and walls, and its floral stucco embellishments on pillars, arches and rising walls.

CHRISTY'S pictures below that of the great hall that was once the reading room — once furnished with gleaming teakwood tables and deep and comfortable chairs that were enriched by the leather — show the richly carved and ornamented ceiling and the stairs to the hall, leading past the wealth of stained glass. The patch on the arch is where the stucco work has fallen off. There is much damage of this variety in the hall, caused by a leaking roof. The ASI promises that not only will the building be made leak-proof, but all the embellishments will be restored exactly as they were and the entire hall made to look once again like what it was in its heyday.

THAT will indeed be a hall to visit!



was introduced in 1930/31. Books were loaned in 1930, a house delivery service was introduced in 1931, discontinued the next year and was revived in 1962. In 1965, the library sent 7500 volumes of books to the battle front for the use of jawans. The reference section and a text book wing were

started in 1981. The Civil Service study circle was started in 1994 sponsored by the Indian Bank and the Tamil Nadu Text Books Society. A Braille and talking section was started in 1995. With the library lacking space, a new block is being constructed at a cost of Rs. 1.48 crore. The library authorities

are also planning to purchase microfilming units at a cost of Rs. 2.5 lakh. The library, they hope, will be upgraded as a reference library with separate facilities. Madras Musings looks forward to the reference section being located in the restored old block and easy access to a well-equipped hall.

## Quizzin' with Ram'nan

Quizzmaster V.V. RAMANAN'S questions are from the period September 1st to 15th. Questions 16 to 20 pertain to Chennai.

1. Who is the new Chief Vigilance Commissioner?
2. Name the two Indian automobile companies figuring in the global top 50 list.
3. Which airliner crashed off Nova Scotia on September 2nd, killing all 229 on board?
4. Name the famed Japanese director who passed away on September 6th?
5. With which British firm has the Tamil Nadu Government signed an MoU for a "Community Internet Project"?
6. Who is the new Prime Minister of Russia?
7. Whose poems, set to music in a cassette titled *Geet Naya Gata Hoon*, was released by the Prime Minister recently?
8. Name the popular villain of Tamil films, known for his laugh, who passed away recently.
9. Who is to be the next Chief Justice of India?
10. Which Indian industrialist has been elected Chairman of the Council of Davos Forum, the global body comprising hundreds of ile?
11. Which famous film-maker has been honoured with Germany's highest award, the Federal Cross of Merit, for his effort in preserving the memory of the Holocaust?
12. Which English football club recently accepted a \$1 billion takeover bid by the media mogul, Rupert Murdoch?
13. Name the mascot of the Commonwealth Games which were held in Kuala Lumpur.
14. Name the latest luxury car to roll out of a plant in Thiruvallur on September 4th.
15. Where was the Non-Aligned summit held recently?
16. According to a recent directive, what is the height to which multi-storeyed buildings can be built in the city?
17. Where in the city was a museum dedicated to C.N. Annadurai inaugurated by the Chief Minister on September 15th?
18. The recent collapse of a building in which suburb of the city has led to a great debate on construction methods?
19. Name the first-ever exclusive infotech institute in the country. It was opened in the city on September 11th.
20. What technological 'first' did the Chennai Police achieve on September 11th?

(Answers on Page 9)

# B & C's white knight

A year and a half ago, one of Chennai's oldest companies, Best & Crompton (B&C), had become a basket case.

B & C was the result of a merger between two old British companies, Best & Co and Crompton Engineering, in 1975. Crompton Engineering was in electrical engineering contracts. Best had interests in the manufacture of lifts, dynamos and starter motors. The merged B&C remained a conservative, risk-averse company, reluctant to make investments for expansion.

The financial institutions (FI) which had a major shareholding in the company, handed over management in 1979 to a professional manager, M K Kumar, under whom the company flourished in the Eighties. Towards the end of that decade, problems erupted again. After many dramatic twists, the company landed in the lap of liquor baron Vijay Mallya. To cut a long story short, things went from bad to worse under Mallya's UB group management and B & C faced the danger of being wound up when it was dragged to the Madras High Court by some of its long suffering creditors. The High Court felt that a turnaround was possible and entrusted the task to a former

Governor of the RBI, S Venkitaraman.

At this point, the Polysindo Group of Indonesia and its founder of Indian origin, Marimuthu Srinivasan, entered the picture. There was a collective sigh of relief from the FIs and the Banks. The Indonesian group was willing to write a cheque for Rs 100 crore to take over what was seen as a doomed company. Who is Srinivasan and what is the Polysindo group?

by S.R.

In Indonesia, till the fall of President Suharto in the aftermath of the economic collapse, connections counted. Srinivasan had those in plenty. He managed to build a billion dollar business empire ranging from textiles to petrochemicals with a combination of business acumen and contacts. In fact, last year, Suharto nominated him to the People's Representative Assembly, Indonesia's highest political body, which met in March this year to elect the new President. The other members of that body consisted of Suharto's children and some close cronies, among others. As of last year, Srinivasan had certainly arrived. Srinivasan's

friendship with Suharto goes back to the Sixties when Suharto came to power after the violent Communist and ethnic riots.

Srinivasan's family comes from Medan in North Sumatera, which is still home to a large community of migrants from South India. He has lived in Jakarta from the Sixties where he established a textile trading business. After some trying times, he established Polysindo in 1984 to focus on the manufacture and trading of polyester chips, PSF and PSY. The timing was good as the government was aiming to reduce the country's dependence on oil and gas exports and build a strong non-oil manufacturing and export base. So it gave strong support to the country's textiles industry, which took giant strides in the Eighties. Textile exports from Indonesia topped over \$6 billion last year.

As Polysindo expanded its textile capacity Srinivasan realised that the next step was to go in for backward integration. In 1993, Polysindo announced a \$650 billion expansion plan which would see the group emerge as Indonesia's first and only fully integrated polyester producer. It aimed towards becoming the most dominant domestic player.

With his position in the domestic market secure, it was time for Srinivasan to go global.

In the last two years he went on a buying spree. Srinivasan created a flutter by acquiring the polyester fibre operations of Germany's Hoechst AG. In India, apart from B&C he was also seriously looking at the fibre business of Thapar-owned JCT and nearer home, Spic's ill-fated petro-chemicals project. Bankers used to joke, "If you have anything to sell, call Polysindo". As it happened, only the B&C sale finally took place.

Reviving B&C has been no cakewalk for Polysindo. Within a matter of months, the Indonesian economy has collapsed. President Suharto has stepped down. Srinivasan's business profile is no longer what it was. In spite of bringing in big bucks, the newly appointed B & C management finds that it cannot singlehandedly run the company without help from the banks and the FIs. For the FIs, Srinivasan is no longer the knight in shining armour. They are not willing to provide working capital. Their attitude is "We have got our money back. Why get into difficulties again?"

As they say "the best laid plans...."

## IN CONCERT, FOR SAFETY

(Continued from Page 1)

a product or ban the product altogether. Despite all its facilities and clout, the US reports 21,000 deaths, 25 million injuries and \$200 billion in societal costs annually due to household products proving unsafe. To bring down these figures is the object of this Federal agency that was set up in 1973 and which has succeeded in improving the scenario by about 20 per cent since then.

The Workshop's other recommendations included:

- The need to fill serious gaps in product specifications. In respect of certain products, there are no specifications at all! In other cases the specifications have not been made mandatory.
- The need to fill the gaps in the existing laws. For instance, the Prevention of Food Adulteration Act does not cover water, "even though one can hardly consume food without taking water". (The specifications for mineral water have not been made mandatory.)

aspect is extremely important.

- Improving enforcement of the existing laws is found to be a major problem. Most of the existing laws provide for only petty fines as punishment, thus trivialising transgressions. More deterrent punishment is necessary, but this would be meaningful only if the law is provided teeth. ("However, there is no guarantee that the offenders will be bitten," it was pointed out.)
- Ensuring there are no delays in concluding the prosecution initiated under the laws. (Even consumer courts now had a year's backlog of cases, it was pointed out.)
- The need for more testing laboratories and facilities accessible to the consumer for easy and cheap testing of basic consumer products, particularly food items. The chambers of commerce and industry as well as industrial associations should include in their code of ethics strict adherence to specifications, particularly in respect of products where the safety

The need for greater punitive action against the manufacturers of spurious/phony/duplicate products. (The Workshop also suggested that consumer organisations should take up this issue and initiate legal proceedings against the manufacturers of such goods, as such initiatives by the consumer groups would be more fruitful than those by the genuine manufacturers, as in the latter case there was the danger of such action being viewed by the legal authorities as a tussle between a mighty Goliath and a tiny David.)

CONCERT promised follow-up action on the recommendations of the Workshop and reiterated its commitment to getting an independent institution established to monitor household consumer product safety. It also agreed to look into the suggestion made by several delegates that there was a need to network all consumer organisations.



October 5-10: An exhibition of Masks and Puppets from various parts of the country (at Manasthala, 12 Cenotaph Road).

October 6-15: 'Cities of the Future'. British designs for cities of the future in a British Council exhibition.

By the year 2025, over half the world's population will be living in cities. Quality of life in cities of the future will be determined by the quality of their design. Design will have a direct impact on economic prosperity, environmental balance and social well-being. The buildings and projects on display represent the best of British design at the turn of the century. Bold, innovative, visionary, and practical, these designs form a complex matrix for the urban lifestyles of the next millennium. (At the Max Mueller Bhavan)

October 10-28: An exhibition of T Vaikuntam's paintings (at the Apparao Galleries.)

# The Frenchman who became 'one of us'



Ever-smiling, ever-joking Eric Auzoux. (Photograph by S Anwar.)

deep relationships he has had in Madras. He stopped smoking here, became mostly vegetarian and did not lose his cool as often as he used to.

Old people fascinated him. He has interviewed on tape and film several interesting people above eighty and developed a particularly close friendship with Mrs. Muktha Venkatesh, the 96-year-old painter in Mysore. The few paintings of her that he has are his proudest possessions. He is also translating her brother Justice Anantharaman's short stories into French with the help of Anantharaman's son and Muktha's son-in-law, A Madhavara. Going to Mysore regularly was a special pleasure and the trips evoked deep emotional stirrings in him.

The compassion he feels for Madras and its culture is something rare. Uma Narayanan who has had a long association with Alliance Francaise says, "Eric stood out for his human qualities. He was so different from the many directors I have seen here, several whom were not really interested in India. But Eric became one of us. I have not seen another like him."

This article is based on a talk the author had with Eric Auzoux, hours before his departure.



Eric Auzoux, in jibba and vershti, as to the manner born.

## CONSUMER NEWS

(Continued from Page 1)

- A random sampling in Chennai revealed that 40% of edible oil was adulterated, 25% of kesari powder and 20% of tea. Interestingly, less than 5% of coffee was adulterated.
- Government is the country's major consumer of food (for hospitals, hostels, prisons etc.). It must insist on Agmark products.
- Water is not a food; it has no calories. Therefore it does not come under the prevention of Food Adulteration Act.
- 80% of bottled and sacheted water in Chennai was found to be contaminated.
- Toned milk was found to contain camel fat!
- Detailed labelling is necessary on all food products.
- Of 40 electric bulbs tested, only four met BIS standards, of electric switches only 13 out of 65 and of 22 branded irons only two! Of those which met the standards, there was no correlation between price and quality.
- Metal caps on bottles were proving a major problem. They either would not open when twisted or, if they did, their burred edges caused injury. Plastic caps or turn caps were necessary.
- Holograms, invisible ink or other such marking methods should be used for spares by genuine manufacturers.

## Answers to Quiz

1. N. Vittal; 2. Maruti Udyog Limited and TELCO; 3. Swissair Flight 111; 4. Akira Kurosawa; 5. WorldTel; 6. Yevgeny Primakov; 7. Atal Bihari Vajpayee; 8. P.S. Veerappa; 9. Justice A.S. Anand; 10. Rahul Bajaj; 11. Steven Spielberg; 12. Manchester United; 13. 'Wira'; 14. Mitsubishi Lancer; 15. Durbna, South Africa.

16. 60 metres (up from 40 metres); 17. At the Anna Memorial; 18. Pervallore; 19. Tamil Nadu Institute of Information Technology (TANITEC); 20. The first Police force to have its own web site.

"What you need is India," angrily suggested Catherine Clement. The celebrated author and wife of the former French ambassador to India had been as upset as Eric Auzoux was.

Eric, then director of the Alliance Francaise in Palestine, had been driving her around, when she asked him to turn around. She had seen a watch tower with a Star of David on it. She had also seen barbed wire fencing. Catherine, a Jew, could not believe her eyes that there were concentration camps created by Jews in Palestine. "How can Jews become tormentors?" she cried. She also decided to skip the conference she was scheduled to attend in Israel the next day. They had to duck the stones hurled by small Palestinian children at foreigners. "How do you think I feel when students are arrested and I see the uncertainty of life all around me?" Eric had asked her. "India is what you need," she had said and urged him to do anything to get to India.

Providentially, there was vacancy, in Madras. "It was a good thing that I had no time to plan for India by reading the colonial writers who would have prepared me for a different India," recalled Eric. Then added, "Of course, my India is Madras."

Eric was interested in India even as a six-year old. His mother had been a part of the Association of Friends of M.K. Gandhi in 1946. She had told Eric a story of people gathering on the railway track as a means of protest and the six-year old had fretted for all those people who, "would get killed." But that the train stopped instead of running over the protesters demonstrated victory in the soul of the opponent. "Mother was very happy when I was posted to India. She died when I was here."

"The most awesome thing about India for me has been its contrasts. Not the beautiful and ugly part of India that everyone speaks of, but the kindness and the cruelty, the inefficiency and the intelligence and several other contrasts." Eric recalled when we met just before his posting came to an end. "The only way is to accept India as she is and respect her for what she is," he added.

One trick, he suggested, was to practise Indian culture. Eric's way into India was the

ghatam. It gave him insights into Carnatic music and the culture that had produced it. Learning from Selvaganesh in the beginning and then with Karthik, Eric feels the ghatam gave his life a rhythm and a discipline. "The nature of my relationships changed the day I began to learn the ghatam," said Eric emotionally. "The number of deep friendships grew and I could meet the culture makers of Madras on their own terms and be accepted for what I am."

"There are some twenty or

by V.R. Devika

thirty people who make culture in Madras. They all became dear to me. So many dynamic people who bring culture alive in Madras. They make things happen here. They maintain the tradition of Madras as the culture capital of the South. I was able to relate to these people on a one-to-one basis. Indian culture came alive to me through them," he recalled.

This was how Eric got involved in organising the *Citizen's Run* in Chennai. "I am unhappy I was given all the credit for the Run," Eric said. "You know how it all started, when we were sitting in Nithyanandan's house where music was being played and were discussing the exorbitant price of shoes. With my Leftist ideas having been revived and sharpened in Palestine, I was seething with anger and wanted to organise a demonstration that said 'Don't do it'.

but it was you who calmed me down and said we must do something useful and not crib. That was the seed of the *Citizen's Run* Trust. The members of the Trust have come together so beautifully. I had an aggressive attitude but it turned out to be a Gandhian event. That the Gandhi Peace Foundation was a beneficiary of the Run was a very happy coincidence."

Eric's mother had given Eric her book on Gandhi. When she was dying, Eric could not be at her side. He had returned to India after spending a month with her. She had lost most of her faculties. But she suddenly brightened up before the end and said, "Poornima is coming". Eric's father who was at her bedside had laughed, saying it was a delusion, but Poornima did in fact walk in. Poornima, Eric's secretary at the Alliance Francaise, had searched for the hospital on a visit to France and reached it just before Eric's mother died.

"I have never acknowledged formally the role Poornima played in getting me assimilated into Indian culture. She gave me access to so many ideas here. She showed me how to cool my mind in a temple. She took me to Karaikal-ammayyar temple in Thiruvallangadu. We walked for an hour-and-a-half to the temple. I owe Poornima a great debt. She has now resigned her job at the Alliance Francaise and has gone off on a pilgrimage. I hope we meet again." Eric is full of compassion and humanity when he talks about the

# Classifying NBFCs

(Continued from Page 1)

would be sufficient to put these companies under the microscope of governance.

N.L. Rajah, advocate, said that companies accepting deposits should form an investors' association and supply to all depositors a list of depositors. He also wanted the Company Law Board to be empowered to prohibit NBFCs from collecting public deposits if there were more than three cases of default in repaying the principal. Commenting on the State Government's new legislation, The Tamil Nadu Protection of Interest of Depositors in Financial Institutions Act, he said

that the non-applicability of the Act to incorporated bodies is a major flaw. Further, he pointed out, the Act comes into operation only after 7.8.97, thereby not providing any relief to those who lost their lifetime savings in companies which closed shop before that date.

"The Act empowers the Court just to attach the properties of delinquent operators and nothing is said as to their disposal," he further pointed out. "In fact, government has hurt the interests of depositors by stating in the Act that no other court has any jurisdiction over the cases coming under the new law. Claims under the

Company Law Board become infructuous."

V. Ramakrishnan, advocate, advised the depositors in incorporated bodies to prefer a complaint to the Company Law Board which is "quite effective" in dealing with defaulting NBFCs. "The Board settles an issue within six months to one year, which is faster than the consumer courts. In the case of unincorporated bodies, the only recourse an unlucky depositor can have is to file an insolvency petition against the firm or file a criminal case for cheating," he added.

— Venkatachari Jagannathan

# Studies, not cricket, his priority

Before the start of the 1997-98 Ranji season, Tamil Nadu selector V. Sivaramakrishnan resigned from the Committee after a year in office. He cited as reason his son Vidyut and nephew Harish Nataraj being in the reckoning for the State side and did not want personal motives attributed if at all they were selected.

The two teenagers would certainly have been on any short list despite their ages. For his consistently good performances in school competitions and other Board junior tournaments, Harish was awarded the C. Subramaniam trophy for the best school cricketer of 1997-98 by the Tamil Nadu Cricket Association.

Born in 1980, Harish is the son of the late S. Nataraj who had played for Karnataka and Tamil Nadu in the Seventies. His maternal uncles, V. Ramnarayan and V. Sivaramakrishnan came close to donning the national colours. With such a family background, it was but natural that he took to serious cricket. His elder brother Naveen represented Tamil Nadu under-12 and Karnataka U-16 in the interstate competitions before going to the United States for further studies.

Back in Madras in 1992, the left-handed opening batsman made an immediate impact among the State juniors and since then has been a prominent member of the various Tamil Nadu age groups teams. The 1995-96 season was a good one, for he scored two centuries and two fifties for the state U-16 team. His highest score till date is the 178 he made



against Andhra in their backyard. However, he considers his best effort his unbeaten 103 against Hyderabad that same season at number five. "I was not keeping good health and my side was not well placed, I kept one end going and added 65 for the last wicket with my cousin Vidyut," he says of that gritty knock.

● by G. Krishnan

He captained Tamil Nadu in the All-India Vijay Merchant Trophy tournament and was also the vice captain of the South Zone U-16 in the national competition. In the season just past, he represented the State U-19 as well as U-22 teams and scored 170 against Andhra U-19 on the same ground where his 178 came. He builds his innings slowly and cautiously and plays safely through the gaps. He has never attended any cricket coaching centre except, of course, the TNCA camps at the start of each season.

Harish, till recently a first year B.Sc (Maths) student at Vivekananda College has been playing in the tough TNCA first division league since 1996, after a year each in the Fifth and Third Divisions. He played for SPIC for two seasons but

switched to Kohinoor CC this year. His notable contributions include 81 against Indian Overseas Bank (which has Kerala and India 'A' leg-spinner K.N. Ananthapadmanabhan, among others) last season and a well-carved 78 against Vijay CC who had former Test wrist spinner L. Sivaramakrishnan, India 'A' and Railways' left-arm spinner Kartik Murali and Goa's J. Gokulakrishnan in their bowling ranks.

For quite some time now, the state selectors had been aware of his presence and picked him for Tamil Nadu teams the last three seasons. State Selection Committee Chairman and former Indian Test leggie V V Kumar feels this determined grafter of runs and brilliant fielder would have made the Ranji Trophy team before long.

Unfortunately for Tamil Nadu cricket, Harish recently left India and cricket behind to pursue higher studies in Computer Science and Economics in the US. He had been thinking of his studies abroad for close to a year and that is why his mind was not fully on the game. "Cricket comes next to studies in order of importance," he told me before he left.

Many in cricketing circles feel he would have reached greater heights in the game. Others feel that with the way things are in the sport, he's made a wise decision by going to Rochester.

Harish, who loves to sketch and listen to music in his spare time, will carry his cricket kit with him to keep in touch with the game.

# Selectors cruel to T N cricketers

As a cricketer, I, like my countless crazy counterparts, lived through my youth with the crazier ups and downs of the game, not the least unkindest cut of which was the number of cruel jokes perpetrated on us by those extraterrestrial creatures called selectors. And through all those frustrating years, it was not unusual to hear a colleague at the workplace or a first-time acquaintance at a party declare with a straight face that he would have become a Test cricketer but for "politics in selection" which snuffed out a promising career at age 12.

Real cricketers are made of sterner stuff. It is we hapless onlookers who give up hope even as talented and determined youngsters battle the whims and fancies of selection committees year after year in the often misplaced hope that one day their red hot deeds and ice cold statistics would prevail over an unseeing, uncaring administration.

Tamil Nadu's S Sharath and D Vasu come to mind as examples of the kind of madness you need, to carry on regardless, when it is becoming increasingly apparent that your surname is more important than the runs you score or the wickets you take, if you want to impress the five wise men who preside over the fates of Indian cricketers. Of the two Tamil Nadu players, it is the all-rounder who might have an outside chance of passing off as a player from Mumbai — if he changes his name to Vasu Diwakar from the other way around.

There are at least three more batsmen in the Tamil Nadu side, all left-handers who have shown greater talent and consistency than say Rohan Gavaskar and Jatin Paranjpe or Hrishikesh

Kanitkar, for that matter. S. Ramesh has impressed all who have seen him except the committee that matters, S Sriram is potentially as good a batsman as any and Hemang Badani is another of obvious talent.

It is not as if Tamil Nadu draws a blank when it comes to bowling potential. S Mahesh has developed into a fine fast-medium bowler who can move the ball effectively besides wielding the long handle rather well. Kumaran is another promising medium-pacer and so is left-armed Dev Anand. I am not suggesting that any of them is in international class, but it is disconcerting that they are never even discussed as India prospects when the Harvinder Singhs, Robin Singh Jrs. and Mohantys seen to saunter in and out of the national eleven. Having been witness to numerous good displays by them at the domestic level in both forms of cricket, I am convinced that they are being consistently overlooked only because someone out there is either too lazy to do his homework or hopelessly blind to Tamil Nadu talent.

Everyone knows that the way Indian selection committees work, you don't stand a chance of being selected unless the member from your zone backs you. The others don't even mention you, they are so busy backing horses bred on their own home turf. With Shivalal Yadav retaining his place in the committee, the only consolation Tamil Nadu players may have is the knowledge that the panel may be equally insensitive to the cause of some Karnataka players, to go by the way its predecessor played football with the likes of Rahul Dravid and Venkatesh Prasad.

— V. Ramnarayan

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