



## Decriminalising Suicide

Page 2



## EMA bans drugs tested in India

Page 3



## Football inspires children

Page 4

# RK Nagar suffers despite promises

ASMITABHA MANNA

Unkept promises and neglect of severe health issues plague the RK Nagar constituency where some 60 candidates are in the fray for the April 12 by-election.

The Kodungaiyur dumpyard, a 110-acre garbage disposal area is an environmental concern for the residents because of the pungent stench, clogged drains and mosquitoes.

"Medical wastes are dumped here on a regular basis that raises questions of sanitation and health. The government has turned a blind eye towards us and decisions are

yet to be taken to maintain solid waste management," says T. Naveenkumar, a resident of Korukkupet and an advocate with the High Court.

The residents are left gasping for breath when smoke from burning garbage and medical waste fills the area. A canal to divert the sewage and waste from the dump yard that was promised to be built five years ago remains unfulfilled, according to Naveenkumar.

Yuvraj, a resident of Tondiarpet and labourer, says "Several cholera cases due to supply of black drinking water were registered since December, within a 3 km



Kodungaiyur dumpyard in smoke.

| THE ALTERNATIVE

radius of the Government Peripheral Hospital in Tondiarpet."

Korukkupet residents are also receiving similar muddy and brackish water for drinking and household purposes since January and are plagued by cholera as well as malaria infections.

Primary health care is not available to the residents in the nearby Chinna Stanley Hospital, a branch of Stanley Hospital, as the doctors are absent on most days.

The residents hope that after the election, the ruling party will take the late AIADMK leader

Jayalalitha's pending initiatives forward. One bridge and a flyover project connecting Coronation Nagar to Ezhil Nagar worth Rs 117 crore is in limbo after her demise. The project is crucial as in the absence of an over-bridge or a subway the road near Korukkupet railway station gets congested and traffic is stalled for hours. Two rail gates in Korrukupet are at the centre of traffic congestion and it takes considerable amount of time for commuters at office hours to cross to Tondiarpet.

"The new government should complete the housing development project in the 42nd division worth

Rs 360 crore started by Amma," says Kannan, a shop owner in Tondiarpet.

Kannan like many others is a worried resident because there is no water sometimes for weeks and there is improper management of Amma Unvagams. He adds that Amma canteens have stopped working because hike in food prices.

"As residents, we can only hope that the suffering from traffic congestion due to rallies and political meetings bear fruit and basic amenities like sanitation, water and food are provided like before," says Kannan.

## Mental disorder highest in Metros



57 million people in India suffer from depression| APA.ORG  
JOSEPH SEBASTIAN

Metros see the highest cases of mental disorder in the country and 1 in 20 suffer from depression, according to National Mental Health Survey (NMHS) 2015-16.

With the youth migrating to cities in search of jobs, they often lose touch with their support system back at home and end up in isolation.

"Today in software companies you never know when you might be asked to leave. You enter the office in the morning and you might be asked to leave by twelve," said Dr. Ravi Samuel, a psychotherapist, about the reasons for the growing number of stressed individuals.

Dr. Samuel explained that cause of depression could range from bad grades in school, separation from a partner, job stress or even death of a pet.

"I see the higher number of cases which stem from failure in romantic relationships and academics," added Dr. Samuel.

While Dr. Samuel said that more youth and elderly come to his clinic for treatment, the NHMS report states that males in the age group of 30-49 were the most affected.

On the back of these growing statistics, Prime Minister Narendra Modi chose to address the issue of mental health in his Mann Ki Baat, his weekly radio address, on Sunday.

However, people always speak

in hush tones whenever they discuss mental health issues.

"My parents were uncomfortable with the fact that I told my cousins that I was seeing a counsellor for my depression when I was in class 12," said Siddharth, a Master's student from Delhi University.

Tamil Nadu State Mental Health Authority held a World Mental Health Day celebration in October last year. It highlighted that superstitious belief and social stigma about mental illness were still common in society.

"Even today, some have a belief that mental illnesses are caused by Black magic and witchcraft. Because of shyness, ignorance, poverty, fear and false belief, family members take the patient to magicians," it said.

However, with the advancement of treatment and diagnostic methods as well as celebrities across the globe addressing the issue, more people have become forthcoming and have started to talk about mental health issues like anxiety and depression.

Dr. Samuel explained the treatment is determined according to the severity of the disorder and how well the patient responds to it. If a patient doesn't respond well to medication, therapy is used.

Recently, WHO announced that the theme of the World Health Day 2017 is Depression: Let's talk.

## 377 Sri Lankan refugees return home

CHANDAN K. MANDAL

More than 300 Sri Lankan refugees have returned home in the first three months of this year indicating an increase in such numbers over the years. ----

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Field Office in Chennai, a total of 377 Sri Lankan refugees living in different camps of Tamil Nadu have voluntarily returned their home country till March 28.

Satchitanand Michael, Associate Repatriation Officer at UNHCR Chennai, said, "The UNHCR has seen an increase in repatriation numbers in recent years due to the prevailing conditions in Sri Lanka is perceived to be safe and peaceful."

Since the three decade long civil-war ended in 2009, Sri Lan-

kan refugees started returning to their native land with the help of UNHCR.

As many as 818 refugees went back in 2009. The number doubled up in 2010 as 2,040 refugees chose voluntary repatriation. Then, 1,673 and 1,264 refugees decided to return in 2011 and 2012 respectively. The number of refugees going back fell further down to 711 and 396 in following two years.

However, the number swelled up in last two years of 2015 and 2016 in which total 1,304 Sri Lankan went back to Sri Lanka.

"While facilitating their voluntary return, we make sure they return back to their home in condition of safety and dignity," said Michael.

According to Michael, along with the end of war, improved safety conditions in Sri Lanka had



Refugees received by UNHCR officer at Colombo |UNHCR

convinced the refugees to return to their homeland.

"The return of the land occupied by the Sri Lankan military in Jaffna and Trincomalee in the year has induced more people to return to those areas as it had impacted posi-

tively on their inclination to return."

Michael, however, admitted that the issues of housing and livelihood for returnees remained a major concern despite people flocking back to their homeland.

The UNHCR India has been facilitating the voluntary repatriation by providing free air tickets for Sri Lankan refugee returning after exit permits have been obtained, conducting pre-departure orientation and providing a small cash grant of INR 750 for domestic travel to the closest airport from their camps.

Upon their arrival in Sri Lanka, the refugees are provided different kinds of assistance.

A reintegration grant of Sri Lankan Rupees 10,000 per adult and Sri Lankan Rupees 7500 per minor was deposited into a bank account in collaboration with Bank of Ceylon, said Michael. A transportation grant of Sri Lankan Rupees 2500 was given to each individual enabling him or her to return home in a safe and dignified mode of transport and rehabilitate lives from the start.

## Chennai split over Aadhaar

ASMITA NANDY

Even after the Supreme Court ordered that the Government cannot make Aadhaar Card mandatory for welfare schemes on March 27, the Chennai Corporation office at Adyar has a long queue of applicants waiting for their turn to get their unique code that recognizes them as citizens of India.

Aadhaar identification is still necessary for non-welfare schemes like opening of bank accounts, filing tax returns, and applying for PAN cards.

Anirudh Krishna (27), an investment advisor, waiting in the queue for the last 90 minutes said, "Now Aadhaar is mandatory for things like buying vehicles and opening a bank account so it is safe to have one."

"I feel Aadhaar is good in a way because all your information is in one platform and you don't need to possess multiple identification proofs."

On being asked if he feels threatened that Aadhaar might disrupt his privacy, he says, "The problem of surveillance is overhyped because anyway all our

information is stored with Facebook and other applications. So if the Government wants it can

**“After all these years, why do we need a code to identify us as Indian citizens?”**

misuse the information even without an Aadhaar card."

Ahead in the queue, three women were engaged in a debate about the necessity of Aadhaar card. While Jayalakshmi (82) and Revathi (72) feel the government has been wise in implementing Aadhaar card, Usha Abraham (71) strongly disagrees.

Usha said, "This is unnecessary trouble for senior citizens. After all these years, why do we need a code to identify us as Indian citizens."

Ravi Selvarajan and Maheshwari Selvarajan, both residing in Canada, are scared that they will lose their property in India if they don't hold an Aadhaar card.

Ravi said, "Although we have dual citizenship, we want to be on

the safe side."

On being asked if he had some trouble with the process of application, he said, "Initially they told us that the application can be done from any office in the city, but when we went to the Guindy office this morning, despite it not having a queue, they told us to apply from the office near our residence. Sometimes, even if the process is easy, the officials make it very complicated for us."

Maheshwari said, "The problem with Aadhaar is that it lacks clarity. It is very similar to the Social Security Number in the West but the difference is that most of the information here is taken manually on a paper that makes it easier for anyone who wants to misuse our information. They should, instead, build a database that is filled up digitally."

Janani Ravi, Manager, FICUS Wildlife, waiting for a long time said, "Sometimes when you choose to go the straightforward way, these processes become even more complicated and takes more time than usual. Sometimes, even if the process is easy, the officials make it very complicated for us and people tend to make mistakes."

## Police disrupt protests over oil exploration

DURGA PRASAD

The Chennai Police removed students' protesters from the Marina Beach where they had gathered to protest against the Central Government signing the contract for oil exploration in Neduvasal, an agriculture village in Pudukkottai District.

As soon as the Central Government signed 31 contracts

Discovered Small Fields (DSF) including Neduvasal on Tuesday, social media sites were flooded with people calling for protests as it happened in January against the ban on jallikattu.

Immediately, a heavy police force was deployed to prevent the protests.

In spite of the police presence, a group of students slipped into the sea on Wednesday afternoon. They were detained and later released.

After an hour, students from University of Madras came to Kamarajar Salai protesting against the contract. The students were evacuated by the police.

One student protestor told a news channel that they were not being permitted by the police to protest in the heart of the city. Many students had refused to come out of the water and were forced out by police.

Earlier, people from Neduvasal had protested for 22 days until March 10 against the oil extraction project in their agricultural land.

On March 9, Tamil Nadu's Public Health Minister C. Vijaya Baskar and Union minister of state for

Shipping P. Radhakrishnan met the people to stop their protesting.

C. Vijaya Bhaskar promised the people that the state government would not support the project without people's acceptance. Radhakrishnan promised to arrange a meeting between the protesters and Union petroleum minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

Following this the protesters temporarily called off the protest in Neduvasal.

On March 22, a delegation of protesters met the Union Petroleum Minister who assured them that the government would not unilaterally produce oil there without addressing their concerns.

In spite of this the Central Government went ahead and signed the contract on March 27.

In the press release after signing the contract, the Central Government said "The Union Petroleum Minister, Union state Shipping Minister and Union Commerce and Industry minister assured the delegation that the work on the field will start when the Government of Tamil Nadu addresses the local concerns in consultation with the Central Government."

People from Neduvasal have been mobilising support from nearby villages and decided to form a core committee to oppose the project. On March 22, a delegation of protesters met the Union Petroleum Minister who assured them that the government would not unilaterally produce oil there without addressing their concerns.

## FISHERMEN'S ARREST

DEEPAK SINGH

The Prime Minister's office is yet to respond to the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister E Palaniswami's letter urging India to send a strong message to Sri Lanka after 12 Tamil fishermen were arrested by the island nation's Navy on March 26.

"The Prime Minister is yet to respond on the matter. Tamil Nadu has been trying to get a permanent solution for the fishermen as the families of those imprisoned in Sri Lanka are suffering. The Chief Minister has also requested Sushma

## CM urges action against Lanka

Swaraj (Minister of External Affairs) to resolve the issue at the highest level," said Gagandeep Singh Bedi, Principal Secretary to Government.

Twelve fishermen from Pudukkottai district were arrested in the early hours of March 26. Of the 12 fishermen, six had sailed from Jegathapattinam fishing base and six others had sailed from Kottapattinam fishing base, before they were caught and taken to Karainagar in Sri Lanka.

In his letter, Palaniswami had also urged the Government of India to ensure the release of all the

fishermen and their boats seized by the Sri Lankan Navy hitherto.

"The Sri Lankan strategy of not releasing the boats of our fishermen is causing great frustration...without their livelihood base, these fishermen are in a state of dependency" Palaniswamy had said.

"50 fishermen from Tamil Nadu are prisoners in Sri Lanka. Moreover about 140 boats belonging to fishermen from the state have been captured by them since Feb 26, 2015," said M. Ilango, Chairperson, National Fishermen Forum (NFF).

Ilango said that fishermen being arrested by the Sri Lankan Navy and the same response by India every time was problematic.

"It's true we are all going there, but it's a tradition and has been so since generations," he said referring to reports that the fishermen had strayed into Sri Lankan territorial waters.

He added that it was due to livelihood that fishermen risked their lives to venture into international waters. "It's not that we are willing to be prisoners."

"United Nations (UN) International Law of the Sea says

that fishermen crossing the maritime border should be chased away and not be caught, but India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are not following that."

The recent letter is one of the many written by the Chief Minister on the arrests. Earlier this month, Palaniswami had written three letters in a week when as many as 32 Indian fishermen were held by Sri Lankan Navy in two days. "The Sri Lankan strategy of not releasing the boats of our fishermen is causing great frustration. These fishermen are dependent" Palaniswamy has said in the letter.

# Anganwadi, mid-day meal employees call for protest

CHANDAN K. MANDAL

Anganwadi and noon meal workers are gearing up for a Tamil Nadu statewide protest demanding time-bound hike in pay and pension. However, there remains the confusion over which organisation will lead the protest.

Last Sunday about 500 retired anganwadi and mid-day meal workers staged a protest at Chepauk demanding increase in pay and pension, which according to them, was not sufficient at present. The protest was organised by the Noon Meal Employees and Anganwadi Workers Federation.

R Karumalayan, General Secretary, Tamil Nadu Chapter of Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) said that 'a fringe group' had led the Chepauk protest.

"We are leading this protest," claimed Karumalayan, adding, "We are organising a statewide protest on April 5."

According to him, the major demands of agitating anganwadi and noon meal workers include reasonable wages, increase in pension, recognition as government workers, benefits as per other social schemes and filling in of vacant



Retired anganwadi and noon meal workers protest at Chepauk on Sunday. | THE HINDU

posts.

"These workers aren't even seen as government staff but only as scheme workers though they work hard and are paid less," complained Karumalayan.

"There are thousands of vacant posts which have added loads of work on other staff."

In Tamil Nadu, the Integrated Child Development Scheme services (ICDS) is being implemented through 49,499 Main Anganwadi Centres and 4,940 Mini Anganwadi Centres, totaling 54,439 Anganwadi Centres functioning under 434 ICDS

Projects. At least two workers – one teacher and one helper – work in these centres.

J. Devika (39), who has been working for five years as a helper in Tharamani Angwadi Centre said her salary increased only by Rs. 700 since she started working.

"My salary is Rs. 4,000 per month. This is not much. Nothing happens with this amount. I stay nearby so this is okay but how would I manage if I had to travel to my work?" asked Devika.

The CITU will organise a protest in front of the ICDS headquarter in Tharamani whereas similar protest

will be held in front of district offices around the State said Karumalayan.

However, the government officials said they had no idea about any such protest happening.

"We do not know which federation organised the protest at Chepauk," said J. M. Jamuna Rani, Joint Director Administration at ICDS.

"In our knowledge, there are five organisation of anganwadi workers. Neither these organisations nor any Anganwadi workers have joined the Chepauk protest. They have denied their participation."

According to Jamuna Rani, she has not received any notice from any organisation about any upcoming protest.

The umbrella organisation of government employees, Tamil Nadu Government Employees' Association (TNGEA) – whose one of the demands include time-scale pay for noon meal and anganwadi workers, have already called for an indefinite strike from April 25.



Artificially ripened fruits are periodically seized from Koyambedu market | MANASA R

## Use of chemicals to ripen fruits rampant

ISSAC JAMES

The use of calcium carbide to ripen fruits has become a common practice in the State, according to K. Vanaja, Assistant Commissioner of Food Safety at the Tamil Nadu Food Safety and Drug Administration.

She warned that the public should take care to wash the fruits and vegetables thoroughly before consuming them.

Last week, 3.5 tonnes of artificially ripened fruits were seized from the Koyambedu wholesale market.

"This has been happening for long time," she said.

Vendors used calcium carbide to

quickly ripen their produce so that they could sell them earlier, said Vanaja.

But according to a research conducted by the Department of Pharmacy at the Dehradun based Institute of Management and Technology, the intake of food substances with calcium carbide could lead to nausea and vomiting, anaemia and low blood pressure.

A report on the United States National Library of Medicine's database said calcium carbide could negatively affect the neurological system. "Once dissolved in water, the carbide produces acetylene gas. Acetylene gas may affect the neurological system by inducing prolonged

hypoxia," it said. Hypoxia is a condition characterized by deficiency in the amount oxygen reaching the body's tissues. The result is headache, dizziness, mood disturbances, memory loss, and seizures.

However, the authorities remained ambiguous about the actions taken against the vendors who used artificial ripening agents. "We conduct raids, and whenever we find substances with chemicals, we destroy them," said Vanaja.

When asked about the measures taken to discourage vendors from using such agents, she said: "We have been trying to persuade them. But they are non-cooperative. They want early profits."

## EC vehicles on prowl in RK Nagar

ASMITA NANDY

Vehicles are being checked for cash or arms at check points in R.K. Nagar ahead of the by-election on April 12.

The Tamil Nadu State Election Commission has deployed special vehicles labelled 'Election Immediate' and 'Video Surveillance Team' patrolling the streets along with police teams.

T. Veerakumar, Inspector, R.K. Nagar Police Station, said, "There are 7 booth locations in the jurisdiction of R.K. Nagar Police Station and 254 polling booths in total, mainly schools. On the day of the election, there will be one police personnel, at least of



Vehicles being checked by police in RK Nagar | ASMITA N

metres in each location. If it is a small location, one police officer might be in charge of two-three polling booths."

"Alcohol sale will be banned for 48 hours before the day of election and if there are rowdy elements, we put them behind bars for at least 6 months", he added.

Veerakumar said the polling locations were selected in such a way that the basic necessities like ramps for the disabled, water supply, electricity and restrooms

were available. "The Election Commission ensures all the facilities are provided and allocates the budget accordingly."

Veerakumar added that on the day of the election there will be 52 Police teams accompanied by the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) to maintain order in the area. Praveen Nair, Returning Officer, Zonal Office-IV, Tondiarpet remained unavailable to

confirm this.

Chennai High School has allotted three classrooms for polling booths while the Corporation School, that has witnessed the last three elections has eight polling booths.

Kalasthri, the security guard at the Corporation School said, "I am here on the day of election and the crowd pours in all day long. The CRPF and Police help to manage the crowd and maintain order". He added, "The voters can use the ground floor staff washroom if there is a need."

Prakash, from Rajasthan now residing in R.K. Nagar said, "I go to cast my vote in ECI Matriculation Higher Secondary School and I have never encountered a problem with regard to safety or facilities at the school."



Will government remove illegal encroachments in Pallikaranai Marshlands? | THE HINDU

## Activists sceptical of saving Pallikaranai

ISHA ARORA

Environmentalists remain sceptical of Pallikaranai marshland restoration even as the High Court has called for registration details of illegal encroachments in the area.

The Court has identified 202 pieces of illegal property on the marshland and directed State Government to provide details of action taken against executors and the beneficiaries, both retired and present, of the documents.

Researcher and activist Nityanand Jayaraman said "The Government will be extremely careful to not touch the existing property unless they are huts belonging to the poor."

He stated that the Government had been actively parcelling out pieces of Pallikaranai for development due to which the marsh area had been reduced to

five square kilometre from the initial size of 50 square kilometre. The failure of registration law would eventually result in the disappearance of the marshland that is beneficial for flood water mitigation, recharging of ground water and regulation of microclimate.

The marshland is divided by the Pallavaram-Thuraiyakkam Road. On one side of the road, the marshland is surrounded by tall buildings. There, migratory birds like Little Grebe, Grey Heron and Indian Pond Heron resting in the ankle-deep water. However, on the other side of the road, the area is mostly parched with a portion of it converted into a sewage dump.

The government had built a storm water drain directly connecting the sea to prevent flooding in the nearby area of Velachery, back in 2015. This

depleted the water level in the marsh, where earlier, excess rainwater from tanks used to flow in, added Jayaraman.

Arun Krishnamurthy, Founder of the Environmentalist Foundation of India said that the massive encroachments and waste dumping had been going on since the last three decades. He attributed Pallikaranai's current state to the ignorance and neglect of people due to their being unaware of the marsh's presence.

"The Court has passed judgements in favour of restoring the area previously too, the degradation process has been going on since three decades now. But nothing has ever been done. We hope that, the changes are well implemented within stipulated time, else we will end up losing this large water storage area," added Krishnamurthy.

## Tracks - yes, But where are the cycles?

KARTIK BHARDWAJ

Although there are cycling tracks around the city, encroachments and lack of safety provisions have rendered them useless.

In KK Nagar where a dedicated 3.8km cycling track was recently inaugurated, the problem of unauthorised parking still exists. Just a week ahead of its opening police seized around 53 vehicles which were encroaching on the track.

"Before the inauguration, we had repeatedly told people not to park their vehicles over the track, but many resume todo so" said MS Bhaskar, R7 Station Inspector.

"We talked to shopkeepers to discourage their buyers from parking their vehicles on the track. This track is meant for school going children and thus their safety



Cycling track on Flag staff Road remains Vacant KARTIK B

is important for us."

However, students at the Padma Seshadri Bala Bhawan, one of the

biggest schools in KK Nagar, do not commute to school via cycles. "Although the track has been

well made, I have personally seen bike riders use the track more than cyclists," says Kumaya, a parent whose child studies at the school, "Cycling is a healthy habit but I don't think the corporations have assured ample safety for kids."

Other cycling tracks in the city like the one at Flag staff road are not being used because they lack dividers which help motorcycle and car drivers to steer their vehicles over it.

"People only use these tracks early morning or at midnight when the traffic is less," says Dominic Savio, a traffic policeman at Flag staff road.

"Most of them are members of cycling clubs with proper cycling gear and protection, children or daily commuters rarely use these tracks. Professionals make use of

these tracks than ordinary people," he added.

Illegal encroachments by food stalls and kiosks are also a problem.

"These are local people and although we have tried to clear the tracks of the stalls, they keep coming back," Savio added.

Cyclist clubs like the Chennai Cycling group also face the same problems when they do their annual cycling events.

"We can't do our events in the evening as the tracks are filled with stalls," said Divagaran Thiagarajan who is the co-founder of the group.

"We need better patrolling in order to use these tracks to the fullest. If the corporations keep allowing these people to have their stalls on the track, it hampers the safety of the cyclists. I think we need better safety provisions."

## Suicide to be decriminalized



Humanity over law for suicide survivors | INDIA.COM

AVANTIKA CHOPHRA

The Mental Health Care Bill passed by the Lok Sabha on Monday has received a mixed response from doctors as some feel that it would not make much of a difference.

As per Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), a person attempting suicide could face imprisonment up to a year, prior to this bill proposed in 2013 and passed in 2016.

The new Bill takes a humane approach towards an individual attempting suicide and considers him or her to be under extreme stress.

Doctor Deepapriya Vishwanathan, a clinical psychologist at Mind Zone mental clinic in Adyar, says "Notwithstanding anything contained in Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code any person who attempts to commit suicide shall be presumed, unless proved otherwise, to have severe stress and shall not be tried and punished under the said Code."

"An individual, who tries to kill himself, is not in a right state of mind and it's good to see that the government has acknowledged this fact," she says. She also feels that this Bill indicates a fresh approach towards mental illness.

Malvika, a PhD student in Clinical Psychology at Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), says "There is a need to spread awareness among people about suicide. A lot of young people who lack proper 'psycho-social' and emotional support, end up self harming or, in worst case scenarios, try to kill themselves."

On the contrary, Dr. Rajesh Mehta, M.B.B.S., M.D. (Psychiatry) in New Delhi, feels that a case by case analysis should be done for each individual. Using a blanket term of either criminalising or decriminalising suicide won't do much.

"Someone who wants to commit suicide will anyway do it. There needs to be a stigma attached to suicide as it is not something that should be encouraged or glorified," he adds.

According to the National Crime Record Bureau (NCRB) report on Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India (AIDI), a 1.5 per cent increase is noted in the number of suicides cases reported and Maharashtra topped the list followed by Tamil Nadu.

Director General of Police of NCRB Dr. Ish Kumar supports the move of decriminalising suicide and says, "But this is my personal opinion. The bureau functions solely on data."

Nandita Bajpal, a criminal lawyer in the Supreme Court, appreciates the move and feels that this bill would prevent the survivor as well as their families from further harassment by Police. She also clarified that Police would continue to register and investigate suicide cases as they need to confirm the act.

As per the bill, an individual who attempted to commit suicide will be provided care, treatment and rehabilitation so as to prevent and reduce the risk of repeated attempts. Adults will also have the right to specify in advance how they would want to be treated and who will look after them should they develop mental illness.

**"There needs to be a stigma attached to suicide as it is not something that should be encouraged or glorified"**

# Vayoshri Yojna to aid BPL senior citizens

## Elders remain sceptical about the schemes' benefits

AVANEESH MISHRA

South Chennai is going to be one of the two districts in Tamil Nadu to implement the 'Rashtriya Vayoshri Yojna' - a scheme to provide assistive devices to senior citizens under the poverty line.

However, not everyone here is sure about this fully central government funded scheme.

R. Marimuthu, a 63-year-old street vendor, who heard about the scheme for the first time, complained about the problems in the already existing schemes for old age people. "How will people get free devices when they cannot get their pensions on time?" he added.

S. Chellama (67), a daily wage worker, welcomed the scheme, though she was unsure about how good it will be to her.

"I am old. I cannot see properly but still I am working. There are many like me and I am not sure if providing help to 2,000 people

would be enough," she said.

If we go through the 2011 census data then there are 10.38 crore senior citizens in the country, out of

get of distributing aids such as walking sticks, elbow crutches, walkers, tripods, hearing aids, wheelchair and artificial dentures

Committee chaired by the Deputy Commissioner or District Collector.

Camps will be organized in two districts of each state for the whole year, operated under the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, and with the expenditure coming from the 'Senior Citizens' Welfare Fund'.

During a press conference the Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Thawar Chand Gehlot, said that the Physical Aids and Assisted-living Devices for Senior citizens will be distributed in Camp mode and the Scheme will be implemented through the sole implementing agency, 'Artificial Limbs Manufacturing Corporation (ALIMCO)', (a PSU under M/o SJ&E), which will undertake one year free maintenance of the aids & assisted living devices.

The scheme was launched on March 26 in the Nellore district of Andhra Pradesh.



The scheme targets those with disability | INDIA NATION

which 5.2 per cent suffer from some age related disability.

The Rs. 477 crore scheme, which was proposed as a part of the 2015-16 central budget, sets a tar-

to 2,000 identified beneficiaries for free in each camp.

Beneficiaries in each district will be identified by the State Governments Administrations through a

# Bookstores may become a thing of past: booksellers

## Giant online retailers a bane to traditional booksellers

ISSAC JAMES

Confronted by giant online retailers like Amazon and Flipkart that are eating into their sales, major booksellers in the city are now looking to boost their online presence.

"The future is online," said Prabhu S., who manages the Velachery outlet of a prominent bookseller and has 13 years of experience handling book sales. He asked not to name his store as he was discussing sales figures and business plans.

"On an average we sell 120-150 books per day. It used to be ten times [higher] in 2004," he said.

He said his company now sold more online than through its physical outlets.

"I don't think the physical stores have a bright future," he said.

Prabhu had worked at various bookstores since 2004.

"When I entered the field, many book stores were bigger than 5000 sq feet," he said. "Look at the size today," he said pointing to his own store which he said was less than 600 sq feet.

"Here we keep only the best sellers," he said.

One of the main reasons for the shrinking space was the decline in



More bookbuyers are turning to online sellers | ISSAC JAMES

the footfall over the last 6-7 years.

Prabhu lamented that the new generation readers rarely visited the bookstores.

"When you look at [the] book buyers who walk in, they are mostly 40 plus. Youngsters do come since our store is in a mall. But often they just turn a few pages and leave without buying anything," he said.

However, it is not just the youngsters who are buying online, but also an increasing number of elders are flocking there these days. Prabhu agreed.

He feared that once the current

buyers stop buying books, the physical stores would struggle to remain relevant. "Maybe 10 years later we may not need to operate [physical] stores," he said.

Das Prakash who is the Assistant Manager of the Odyssey store on the East Coast Road agreed.

"One of the biggest ways the online shopping has affected [our books sales] is that we have lost the new generation readers," he said adding that older customers continued to visit the store.

He agreed that Odyssey's sales had taken a hit since the advent of the giant retailers. However, he

refused to discuss the company's online plans.

Balaji, who manages the Starmark store at the Phoenix Mall asserted that the "real booklovers" would continue buy from the physical bookstores.

However, even some of the bookstore visitors agreed that they "buy more" online.

"I come here often, but buy only once in a while," said Ram Nath (54) who owns a big collection of books. These days, he is shopping online. "Online has its advantages. I buy books [for] Kindle. [I] can read them anywhere at any time," he said. He was once a regular buyer at book stores. Today, he enjoys walking into a bookstore to "turn pages."

"I usually buy online," said Luke Francis (16) with a sense of pride. "I come to bookstores only to buy comics," he said. "I want to see the graphics and feel the pages [of comic books]," he added.

One of the things that attract book buyers to the online retailers offer. "There is a 25-30 percent discount on most books," said A. Manna (23). "When I can buy eight books for Rs. 2000 online, why would I buy four for the same price from a shop?" he asked.



EMA cited deficiencies in documentation and data handling

| REUTERS

# EMA bans 300 drugs tested in Indian lab

DEEPAK SINGH

The European Medicines Agency (EMA) has suspended the use of 300 medicines after finding the quality control tests conducted by a Chennai based research lab "unreliable".

A Press Release from the agency said that the "review of these medicines studied by Micro Therapeutic Research Lab was started after inspections identified several concerns at the company's sites regarding misrepresentation of data handling."

Micro Therapeutic Research Lab (MTRL), a contract research organisation (CRO), conducts bioequivalence studies of analytical and clinical parts of various medicines in Europe.

"Suppose you are making a medicine similar to Paracetamol, Bio Equitability (BE) or

Bioequivalence test of my medicine will tell me how equally effective my medicine is. So, Bioequivalence is a measurement criterion for bringing a medicine into a market," said Dr. Bhavin Patel, Consultant Neurosurgeon at a Voluntary Health Service Hospital.

The Committee for Medicinal Products for Human Use (CHMP) of EMA concluded the lab's study conducted between June 2012 and June 2016 could not be accepted for marketing authorization. Companies can market their medicines only after they have received marketing authorization by the regulatory body.

"We are still working on the results and I cannot comment any further on it," said Vasanthi, Head of Department, Business and Development, MTRL.

The EMA also said that "there is

no evidence of harm or lack of effectiveness of medicines...on the basis of studies at the sites" and said that the suspension on the use of medicines which are of critical importance for different reasons could be postponed temporarily.

"There are many such testing labs in India that review and provide the Bio Equitability data and more for foreign medical companies," Dr. Bhavin said.

India has the capability to do these tests at a much cheaper rate. "To get these tests done in India, a company will spend one tenth of the money it will spend on the same tests in Europe," he said.

Talking about the quality of test results, he said that we are an "average" if compared internationally. "We have lot of scope to improve, but we are doing well and our medicines are used by many countries," he said.

# More takers for regional films with sub-titles

AVINASH R.

Multiplexes in the city are now screening other regional language films and some with sub-titles to cater to a wide audience.

The increase in the number of industries, Information Technology in particular and the ever growing number of educational institutions has resulted in a spike in the population of people from other parts of India.

Regional films like those in Malayalam, Telugu, Kannada and Hindi constitute 55 per cent of the shows in the city.

The success of various regional movies in Chennai shows that the audience for these movies is not just restricted to ones who know that language, but also includes the ones who are willing to watch a movie with English subtitles.

"We used to watch international films in Chennai. Piracy, torrents and delay in the release pulled

away such crowds from the screenings. With subtitles and worldwide releases, there is an increase in the patronage for such movies," said Rekha Haricharan, who does sub-titles for movies.

Not just the international films but the movies with actors who are not limited to one particular film industry ensures an audience that includes people who don't understand that particular language.

For instance, in a time and age when Tamil movies find it difficult to run for 25 days, the Malayalam movie 'Premam' ran for more than 200 days in a multiplex in Chennai.

While some are excited about the prospects of watching movies of other languages, some seem to find the sub-titles a hindrance to their movie watching experience.

"It is highly distracting. My eyes go right to those words and many a time I find the audience reacting to a scene by reading the dialogues even before the actors have

finished performing that scene," said Nishitha, an assistant director, who works in the Tamil film industry.

This is a major reason why many Tamil filmmakers seem to be uninterested in releasing their movies in Tamil Nadu with the subtitles, which would open up the doors for people from other parts.

An executive from a multiplex in Chennai said that unlike the single screen theatres in the city, they have the luxury of running other regional movies with subtitles and offering variety to the audience because of the number of screens.

"With the success of regional movies like Bahubali and Drishyam across India, the commercial viability of subtitled movie is there for the producers to see. Subtitling is growing at rapid pace and is very much here to stay," said Vivek Ranjit, a subtitlist, working in the Malayalam Film Industry.

# Biometric system fails to impress schools

ASMITHABHA MANNA

Teachers and administrative officials are dismissive of the State Government's decision to install biometric attendance system in schools. Teachers and officials feel that it is "ineffective".

"The biometric system is not different from recording attendance in registers. In a class of 40 a teacher should know each student," says Miss Vijayavalli, Principal of Kumararani Meena Muthiah Secondary School in Adyar.

According to Vijayavalli, the school has been equipped with a biometric system but only for employees. The teachers should be vigilant and aware of students relying on proxy attendance.

The administrative staff maintain a thorough paperwork of both students and teachers' attendance while the biometric identification is a secondary record for regulars.

"For part timers it is helpful as they are off on some days and when they attend they use the biometric system," says Vijayavalli emphasizing the difficulty in



Biometric system would curb proxies:Govt | ASMITHABHA MANNA

maintaining vigilance on regular teachers as on days they come and mark attendance for the next days.

Vijayavalli says, "It is not that teachers do not attend the next day but they don't have class and visit for a brief time while time is not a matter for us." However, she adds that teachers know their responsibility and are always particular about school timings.

The move by the Department of School Education in the wake of increasing absenteeism and proxy attendance will be unable to remedy the situation, according to a senior teaching official of Vana Vani Matriculation Higher Secondary School that has biometric identification installed for employees 2015.

"I am not for it, as it will not help students. It is a parent-oriented school and the latecomers cannot be sent back so the time becomes irrelevant" says the official.

Some are in the dark as to how to use the biometric system and say the government should send out a circular explaining the process.

"I should know how it works before I can explain it to others," said Leela, Principal of Kesari H.S.S, T Nagar.

# Not an easy ride for this driver

BECHU S.

When 42-year-old Nizam Ali decided to leave his job with a travel agency at Nungambakkam to enroll with the Uber Cab service two years ago, future looked promising to him. The choice he made proved to be a smart one pretty soon, as he was earning twice as much as he did with his earlier job.

From a fixed Rs.3,000 that was paid for every three or four day package tours he was hired for occasionally, he started earning Rs. 5,000 a day. Though 55% of his daily collections belong to Uber, Nizam was happy with the Rs. 2,000 he earned daily.

"I never had earned so much in any profession, I made enough money to make ends meet," he said.

Back in 2014, there were only a few thousand cars in the city attached to the California-based transport network. With a modest number of employees and plenty of customers, it was easy for Uber to have a 'driver-oriented-approach' instead of a 'customer-oriented-approach.'

On any given day between 6



Can the online cabbies navigate a way out? | BECHU S.

AM to 2 AM, Nizam managed 50 pick-ups and earned anything between Rs. 5,500 to Rs.7, 000. There was no work pressure and plenty of opportunities for everyone.

"My Indica used to run around 500 kilometers every day and I hardly had a bad day. A few drivers that I knew of had pretty much the same fate."

However, with the increasing competition between Uber and Ola and more drivers signing up, the driver-friendly approach of his company was long gone. The year 2015 saw the number of online

taxi cars in the city growing past 20,000 and touching the 30,000 mark this year. Adding to the drivers' woes, the company subscribed to slashing rates during peak hours to stay in the business.

"Earlier, any ride from the Chennai Central Zone between 10 PM and 5 AM was accounted as boost hour rides and an extra 50% was charged. As their competition became worse, the rates were reduced," Nizam said.

He always preferred to look for passengers near George Town, and at Central and Sub-urban railway stations. But now even in

passenger hotspots like George Town, Guindy and Airport Road, it has become 'a game of luck'.

"They did not stop at that, but introduced discount coupons instead. Every man in the city with the app installed are given discount codes as SMS on daily basis. The ridiculous traffic in the city and rocketing diesel prices made it worse. How can we not protest?" he asked.

Nizam is unsure if the protests are good enough to make the Multi National Corporations rethink.

"When we went on the strike, many geniuses took it as an opportunity to earn more. Fewer taxis meant more money, if everyone is not loyal to the cause, how can we attain our goal? We protested because our profession and livelihood are at stake."

"A liter of diesel costs Rs. 62 and the mileage of my vehicle is 17 km per liter. I cover approximately 240 kilometers a day and earn around Rs.2,000. With 55 percent of the collection going to my employer coupled with fuel expenditure, do the math and tell me, how much I earn," he said.

# Kicking away their misfortune

JOSEPH SEBASTIAN

It was an opportunity for them to kick away their misfortune and pick up confidence and good-decision making skills.

Each member of the ten teams that participated in the SnS Soccer 2017 tournament on Friday, had a childhood filled with hardships. Each one was either a poor child, child labourer or a runaway before they were rehabilitated by Karunalaya, a non-profit organisation.

Each player had a story. Varsha was rescued from the Kasimedu fishing harbour in Chennai and was provided shelter at one of Karunalaya's shelter for girls. In the girls' final played between SVN Sigaram Thodu and KMP Crackers a first half strike by SVN's Varsha and a solid defensive performance by the team saw them



(L-R) Kids in action ; Varsha winning the best player trophy

JOSEPH SEBASTIAN

lift the trophy.

Dr. N. Paul Sunder Singh, Secretary of the non-profit organisation, spoke about the importance of sports and how it emancipates everyone who participates in it. "Football is a game where you

learn a lot of values like self-confidence, good decision making and accept failure," he said. Many street children often fall into the trap of drugs, alcohol and tobacco products. But sports has helped to deter children from going back to these habits and in fact,

have lured children out of it. Children love playing sports and knowing this Dr. Singh says that only those who do not consume these products are selected. "We have dope tests," he added while talking about the selection procedure for a cricket tournament.

Praising the teams' efforts, former India player and current Chennaiyin FC Assistant Coach Syed Sabir Pasha shared instances of famous football players who made it despite hard knocks in life. He gave the example of legendary Brazilian footballer Pele. "There is immense talent in our country. What we lack is proper scouting. You'll find talent in the smallest of villages," he exclaimed.

Pasha clicked pictures with six boys', and four girls' teams that participated in the tournament and the joy in each one of their faces confirmed that while there were just two winners, football was the real victor.

The tournament was organised by the second year students of Madras School of Social Work in collaboration with Karunalaya and held at SDAT Nehru Park in Chetpet.



The BMW i8 at an auto-expo.

JAVANEESH MISHRA

## Ban on BS-III cars shake auto firms

JAVANEESH MISHRA

At a time when the automobile and two-wheeler industry seems to have shaken off the effects of demonetization with sales climbing up again, the Supreme Court's decision to disallow sale and registration of BS-III vehicles from April 1 might be another blow to the industry.

BS (Bharat Stage) is the emission standards established by the Indian Government to limit air pollutants coming out of internal combustion engines found in motor vehicles.

According to reports, top commercial vehicle makers such as Tata Motors, Ashok Leyland and Mahindra & Mahindra, and two-wheeler majors Hero MotoCorp, Honda and TVS are loaded with a near-junk inventory worth over Rs 12,000 crore.

These reports also say that some two-wheeler companies are offering discounts up to 50 per cent with the hope selling the vehicles that would be deemed illegal after April 1.

A plea from the companies to allow the sale of already made and dispatched BS-III vehicles had been rejected by the Supreme Court.

After demonetization, the sales of automobile in India fell more than 18 per cent in December, making it the steepest in last 16

years. But as the effect of demonetization is fading gradually, the sales are expected to rise.

During 'The Hindu Auto Expo' organized at Chennai Trade Centre, Nandambakkam on Saturday, the Deputy Zonal Head of Hero, B. Swaminathan said "Though things like these are happening, auto industry in India is growing, and with the international players taking more interest in the Indian market, it is expected to grow more."

According to R. Srinivasan, manager of a Hero showroom in Adyar, "If we leave the two months after demonetization, there is a trend of people buying vehicles that cost a fortune. The purchasing power of people is increasing and now they want more."

Inaugurated by Chennai City Commissioner of Police, S. George, the expo showcased cars from India and several other countries, including Japan and Korea. The cars on display were Rolls Royce Ghost, Rolls Royce Phantom, BMW i8, Maserati Quattroporte, Mercedes C-43 AMG and Tata Motors' Hexa and Tiago.

"These kinds of expos bring the buyers and their dream vehicles under one roof," said Lakshmi Sha, Area Manager of Hero.

Hero also re-launched three of its scooters — Maestro Edge, Pleasure and the Glamour.



Kids living under the sky as their roof.

BECHUS

## Still in search of a home

BECHUS

'Mooker Nallamuthu Street' is one of the busiest alleys of Sowcarpet in North Chennai. Right at the beginning of the street there is a line of shacks inhabited by over ten families. For walls they have aluminium sheets, and clothes hanging down as doors. The roof is made up of old sacks, plastic sheets, aluminium sheets and clothes.

After the Chennai flood of 2015, the scorching summer is making things difficult for them.

"Babies suffer the most as they are unable to sleep inside the houses. It is too hot for them. Without proper roofing, the heat hits us even if we stay inside," said Velu (28), a cycle-rickshaw puller in Burma Bazaar.

Raju, an auto-rickshaw driver in Sowcarpet, said his wife Vasanthi suffered from blisters and headache because of cooking on the roadside on a kerosene stove.

Fans are totally out of the question as there is no power supply to the huts.

The resettlement project that was promised to the residents still remains on paper.

"The Councillor had promised us proper houses if we vote for them, but nothing's happened. The summer is here and the fight for water will increase," said Selvi, an ardent supporter of All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam.

These "illegal tenants," all belonging to the "Adi-Dravidar" nomadic group had tackled the summers in earlier times by shifting to closed shops and other abandoned buildings during the day.

They returned only by night to sleep. But, by the time they returned either the police would have confiscated their belongings for causing traffic problems, or rash drivers would have broken their cooking pots.

During the rains, the families cannot stay inside the shacks due to leaky roofs. The shopkeepers do not allow them to stay by their verandahs during working hours.

None of the ten families are aware of the shelters that are run by the Chennai Corporation for the homeless. They do not know if they are counted by the authorities as homeless.

However, they are not willing to abandon their houses unless they are offered proper houses as promised.

A report by the Information and Resource Centre for the Deprived Urban Communities, an NGO, said that in the last three years, 1464 urban homeless have been reintegrated with their families and 172 individuals rehabilitated.

The report also said the Corporation presently does not have enough shelters to rehabilitate all the homeless and street dwellers in the city.

## College students to give India a head start

AVANTIKA CHOPRA

The 'Start-up' craze in India has encouraged a lot of youngsters to invest in their ideas and follow their passion. This was evident at 'Brain Talk', a meeting organised by college students inviting startup enthusiasts to discuss their ideas and experiences.

"The purpose of this meet is to create an offline network as it is important to have a platform where budding start-ups owners can interact with others and build a professional bond," said Srinivas, a final year college student at SRM university and owner of Absolutes IT services.

Srinivas started his company in December 2016 with the help of his father and brother. His company focuses on providing client based application and software.

Quoting 'Zero to one', a book on startups, another start up owner Shreeesh Pillai said, "The next Bill Gates will not build an operating system and the next Mark Zuckerberg won't create a social network. We need to come up with unique ideas to make a place in this market."

Shreeesh, a final year student, has developed his own App 'Iparko' to provide solutions for parking issues in the city.

"As of now Iparko is its prototype stage but we will soon provide solutions for all parking issues," he

added.

Sebastian John, the owner of Fashnoid, quit his job to focus on his start up.

"You can never build up anything if your idea remains in your head," said John. He also highlighted the common misconception of 'ideas developers' that if they share their ideas, someone will steal it. "Your idea will only evolve and shape itself when you share it," he added.

Start Up India, a flagship initiative by the Government of India was launched in 2016 to provide assistance and incentives to nurture an innovation in the country. However, most of the startup owners and enthusiasts feel that the scheme is a scam and they are far from benefiting from it.

"The scheme is just for the sake of it. I contacted them several times for assistance but they were unresponsive and cold," said Sehaj Sahni, the owner of Urban Desi House, a small restaurant in Thoraipakkam.

"I don't think we can expect any money from the government," added John.

Money constraint is a major issue faced by many startup owners, moreover they also feel vulnerable in the hands of investors.

"There are investors who are known as the 'Angels' of startups but they are 'devils,'" added Srinivas.

## Chennai theatre takes centre stage

AVINASH R

It is not every day that a theatre production house stages a play with the actors and directors chosen by lots and the script handed to them just 24 hours before the ticketed show is staged.

Commemorating the World Theatre Day (27 March), Karthik Gowrishankar, a theatre artist, said "The theatre scene in Chennai is at a very exciting place. There is still a solid fan following for the traditional plays while experimentation is garnering its own fan base."

Just like in Tamil Cinema, even the theatre scene has its very own celebrated genres and stars.

Though the English theatre has constantly reinvented itself and dabbled across various genres, the Tamil theatre scene has been predominantly restricted to humour.

The initial days of mythology and patriotic flavour gave way to humour and satire. The top players in the Tamil theatre have remained so for the past thirty years.

"It was comparatively easier to break into the English theatre scene unlike the Tamil scene because English theatre had a niche audience and word-of-mouth spread faster.

English theatre allowed experimentation



A stage is all they need.

GOOGLE IMAGES

whereas Tamil theatre was too rigid and relied heavily on humour," said Raghav, a theatre artist.

However, there seems to be a lot of experimentation done in the Tamil theatre scene too. Though it is still tough to move away

from the core of various other genres and styles.

A period set-up, pantomimes, aerial acrobatics, animation and even remakes has led to the inclusion of newer talent who are willing to stay true to the Tamil theatre scene,

move forward and take the theatre along with them.

In the 1980's and 1990's, actors could take a leave of absence from their Government jobs and concentrate on acting. They could take extended holidays to concentrate on their stage careers. However, the corporate set-up that most actors find themselves in now, doesn't give them the luxury of time for rehearsals and staging.

"I wanted to act. I did a few plays but I have to stay away from theatre. Passion for the art is feasible enough to just feed me. It is not enough for the family," said Iswarya Rajagopal, a corporate employee and theatre artist.

Though such incidents are plenty in number across the performing arts space, there are also people who have quit their well-cushioned jobs to pursue their passion for the stage.

"I quit. I couldn't work within the four walls of a box and look at another box for hours together. I had to work and think out-of-the-box," said Anantharaman Karthik, a full-time theatre director.

## Ready to take a bike on a date? Reinvention of the Wheel

ISHA ARORA

A first of its kind in the city, Date-A-Bike (DAB) is a motorcycle rental company that has devised an innovative way to curb accidents due to overspeeding.

The café is the brainchild of Vikram Sethuraman and Girish Gopalakrishnan who left the corporate monotony to feed their passion for cruiser bikes. Apart from setting up the rental company, they also organised road trips and took travellers along.

"People purchase bikes for two lakhs and wear helmets worth Rs. 200, it needs to be understood that investment entails security measures too," said Vikram Sethuraman.

DAB lends high end cruiser motorcycles like Harley Davidson and Triumph with a tracking software and SIM Card with data pack attached. A speed limit of 80 kmph has been set in the bikes and whenever a biker exceeds the limit, the customer is sent a message.

After the warning is sent across for three times in a row, the bike stops and needs a code



Date-A-Bike Workplace.

EZHIL RAMAKRISHNAN

from the DAB personnel to start again.

"Our screening process is pretty strict, we take bikers above 25 years of age for rides till Mahabalipuram and Pondicherry, make them ride during night and ascertain whether they are fit to take off alone," added Girish.

The founders said that their's is a fresh concept in contrast to the old travelling groups

that are conservative in their approach.

"The response since our inception in 2015 has been good from the customers' end, while the government is yet to provide us with a licence, it has been over two years now," said Vikram.

Apart from renting out bikes, the company also provides helmets, jackets, bags, shoes and other riding gear to its customers.

KARTIK BHARDWAJ

The porch of the duplex has people, sitting on their haunches, tightening the bolts of a three-wheeled vehicle. The man who invented the vehicle, 26-year-old Naidhroven. A sits in the living room, which is a makeshift office.

"We started Nappinnai back in 2014," he reminisced. "For a physically handicapped person like me, before installing additional wheels I had to file a series of documents and getting permission from the government is also mandatory."

Nappinnai is an e-scooter initiative which was started by Naidhroven to aid his muscular dystrophy, a hereditary condition which leads to progressive weakening of the muscles. "I always hated wheelchairs," he says. Thus, in order to fight the prejudice attached to vehicles for handicapped people, Nappinnai made Scotra CML, a three-wheeled e-scooter which can be used by handicapped people, children and old people. "We don't make vehicles for people with phy-



sical ailments; we make them for daily use of normal people and attach additional security provisions to make them easily rideable by handicapped people."

Scotra CML, the prime product of Nappinnai, can go up to 15 to 20 km on one charge. "Initially, it was only made for indoor purposes but people wanted to travel from Besant Nagar to Adyar at least if not Anna Nagar," said Naidhroven.

He added, "We had to assure people that it is safe for them. People asked for a lot of modifications to the product to suit their personal tastes and to give themselves better chances of security. I personally did a lot of market research."

With an initial investment of Rs 42 lakhs, Naidhroven started the venture from his house in Besant Nagar. The Tamil Nadu government also sanctioned a sum of Rs 25 lakhs for his idea. "For the raw materials and labour, we get a lot of workers from Guindy Industrial area and Ekkaduthangal."