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Sasikala out, Palaniswami in as CM

Sasikala is now Prisoner Number 9234 in Bengaluru jail; TN Governor asks Palaniswami to form Govt.

SURBHI GUPTA

After a weeklong crisis in the ruling AIADMK, Edappadi K. Palaniswami has been sworn in as the 29th Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu. All ministers from the previous cabinet, except O. Panneerselvam and Ma Foi K. Pandiarajan, were retained in the 31 member ministry.

Palaniswami won the vote of confidence in the Assembly on February 18 after the DMK members were expelled from the House after they disrupted the proceedings in the House. The DMK wanted the vote postponed but the Speaker P Dhanapal rejected the demand.

The party's interim General Secretary VK Sasikala handpicked Palaniswami, a four-time MLA from Salem, after she was convicted by the Supreme Court in

the Disproportionate Assets case.

The crisis in the ruling AIADMK erupted after Panneerselvam declared that he had been forced to resign to make way for Sasikala to take over as Chief Minister. But Sasikala was convicted and jailed. Before she went to jail in Bengaluru, Sasikala nominated Palaniswami as the leader of the AIADMK party.

Sasikala had revoked the suspension of her nephews, T.T.V. Dinakaran and S. Venkatesh, readmitted them as members and made Dinakaran deputy general secretary of the party.

This has led to allegations that the Sasikala camp was having a stranglehold on the party and the state administration.

Palaniswami is confident of passing the floor test with the support of 124 MLAs. However there have been allegations that the

MLAs are being held hostage. They are being coerced into supporting Sasikala's nominee.

Addressing the media after visiting former Chief Minister Jayalalitha's memorial, Panneerselvam said, "The Tamil Nadu government sworn-in today is anti-people... We have taken a vow at Amma's memorial to make people aware of the situation in the party and ways to bring the party out of it."

Meanwhile in Delhi, eight Lok Sabha and two Rajya Sabha Members of Parliament of AIADMK met the Election Commission (EC) and submitted a letter stating that Sasikala's appointment as interim general secretary of the party was illegal. The commission has issued a notice to Sasikala.

Soon after the swearing in ceremony, supporters of Panneerselvam and the newly-inducted Minister C.V. Shanmugam, clashed in front of the ministers' bungalow on Greenways Road. One man and a policeman were injured and the situation was brought under control by the police.

The Hindu, also reported tensions at Bodinayakanur town in Dindigul as supporters of Sasikala and Panneerselvam. Panneerselvam's office was attacked and banners were torn. In turn, his supporters pelted stones at the supporters of Balamurugan, AIADMK secretary of the town; they damaged his car too. There has been a heavy deployment of police in the area.



VK Sasikala at Jayalalitha's memorial after conviction | REUTERS

Sasikala and others convicted in DA case

Case Jayalalitha abated due to death

SUMEDHA GROVER

AIADMK interim General Secretary VK Sasikala, has been lodged in the Parappana Agrahara jail in Bengaluru following her conviction by the Supreme Court in the Rs 66 crore disproportionate assets case.

The judgment bars her from contesting elections for ten years effectively preventing her from becoming the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu in the near future.

Upholding the 2014 judgment of the Bengaluru Trial Court, the Supreme Court directed Sasikala to complete the remainder of her four year sentence. She had already served six-months in jail earlier.

The apex court sentenced her and two other relatives to four years imprisonment and ordered them to pay a fine of Rs 10 crore each.

The court also upheld the charges against former Chief Minister Jayalalitha, but said the case against her had abated due to her death. The Rs. 100 crore fine imposed by the Bengaluru court, though, still has to be recovered by the Tamil Nadu government.

"The judgment doesn't provide ample justification for abating the charges yet retaining the fine. There seems to be some incongruity in that. There seems to be only the moral finding of guilt against her," said Subrith Parthasarathy, Advocate, Madras

High Court.

"Though it is clear from the judgment that had she been alive she would have been rendered the same verdict," he added.

Sasikala visited Jayalalitha's memorial on her way to Bengaluru to surrender before the Bengaluru Trial Court. While offering prayers, Sasikala hit the memorial thrice and took a vow which was later clarified by the AIADMK in a tweet which stated, "I will overcome hurdle(s), treachery and (the) plotting (against me)."

Most AIADMK supporters of O Panneerselvam's camp welcomed the verdict but refused to acknowledge that former party chief Jayalalitha had also been convicted.

TIMELINE

1996: BJP member Subramanian Swamy, then Janata Party chief, filed a case against J Jayalalitha which alleged that during her tenure as Tamil Nadu Chief Minister from 1991 to 1996, she amassed properties worth Rs 66.65 crore which was disproportionate to her known sources of income.

1997: Prosecution was launched against her and three others, including VK Sasikala and her relatives J Ilavarasi and VN Sudhakaran.

The accused were charged under the Prevention of Corruption Act, 1988. Madras High Court dismisses petitions by Jayalalitha including one challenging the sanction granted by the Governor for prosecuting her.

2003: The case was transferred to the Bengaluru

Trial Court on the grounds that a fair trial was not possible in Tamil Nadu with her as Chief Minister.

2014: The Special Court convicted Jayalalitha, Sasikala and the others on charges of illegal property acquisition and awarded four years' prison term. Jayalalitha was fined Rs. 100 crore while the others were fined Rs. 10 crore each.

2015: All the four were later acquitted by a single judge bench of the Karnataka High Court. The Karnataka Government appealed in the Supreme Court against the acquittal.

2016: Supreme Court reserves verdict on appeals in DA case. Jayalalitha dies in December.

2017: The Supreme Court on February 14 upheld the trial court's conviction.

'No one can replace Amma'

VARUN DIKSHIT

Residents of RK Nagar, former Chief Minister Jayalalitha's constituency in North Chennai, have welcomed the conviction of AIADMK interim General Secretary, VK Sasikala, in the Disproportionate Assets case and said that "none can replace Amma."

"Sasikala is not even an elected MLA. It is good that she has been convicted as people of Tamil Nadu would have never accepted her as the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu," said Sanjay Gandhi, a medical representative.

Jayalalitha won from the RK Nagar constituency in 2011 and 2016 with a thumping majority. Her demise has left a huge political void in R K Nagar.

"I voted for Jayalalitha and not for Sasikala. No one can replace Amma in our life," said Devraj, a local businessman.

"Sasikala is responsible for Amma's death," he said angrily.

People in the R K Nagar were ignorant that along with Sasikala the Supreme Court had also upheld the trial court's conviction of Jayalalitha, who was Accused No 1 in the disproportionate assets case. Some even cited Sasikala's 'bad influence' as the reason behind "Amma" getting mired in cases.

"It is because of Sasikala that Amma's name cropped up in the [DA] case," said Vallikumar S, who owns a small accessory shop in R K Nagar.

Vallikumar was not satisfied with the punishment given to Sasikala

"Ideally she should be locked in the jail for lifetime as after 4 years she will come back and rule AIADMK and will again indulge in corrupt practices."

Most of the people in the area wanted O Panneerselvam to become Chief Minister.

Ameer Hamza, a helmet shop owner said "We have neutral feelings towards Panneerselvam as he hasn't done anything wrong thus far and since Amma wanted him to be the Chief Minister ideally he should have been the Chief Minister of state."

Some residents were tired of the never ending cycle of events set in motion by the AIADMK crisis and wanted some closure.

"Since Amma's death, the city has been in a state of turmoil. First cyclone Vardah wreaked havoc, then mystery shrouded Amma's death followed by the Jallikattu protests that rocked Chennai. Now, the fight for power within AIADMK..." said Sivalingam, a car accessories shop owner.

There were a few staunch AIADMK loyalists like Sreedhar too.

"I will vote for the AIADMK, irrespective of who becomes the Chief Minister. If the party leadership projects someone, we will accept the candidate," he said.

'India, China differ on threat perceptions'

TSHERING DORJI

China does not view India as a threat because it is economically weak and lacks comprehensive power at the international level, according to Dr. David Brewster of the National Security College, Australian National University, Canberra.

Brewster made it clear that China's interest in the Indian Ocean was to protect its Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) and ensure the security and safety of Chinese nationals and assets in the region.

Speaking about India and China's strategic ambition in the Indian Ocean and Western Pacific, Dr. Brewster observed that while India viewed China as the primary threat to its national security the Chinese did not have a similar perception about India. This created an asymmetry of threat perceptions complicating the dynamics and interaction between the two countries, he added.

Brewster said the United States' dominance was eroding with the rise of China and the emergence of India as major regional powers. The relationship between India and China was critical because of the competition between the two countries. The maritime region has significant elements of competition and there was the potential to make the relationship more competitive.

Brewster pointed out that China was closely studying India's activities in South Asia including its growing relationship with Association of

Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states. China was also demonstrating sensitivity in dealing with India's neighbouring nations. This was driven by a perception different from the Chinese view towards East Asia.

Whenever China perceived India's actions as harming its interests, it responded with retaliation. In 2015, a few days after the Chinese Prime Minister Xi Jinping visited India, a Chinese submarine unexpectedly sailed into Sri Lanka, which is seen as India's backyard.

Brewster said India's increasing ties with the China's traditional neighbours like Vietnam, Singapore, Japan and Taiwan, made China jittery. Dr. Lawrence Prabhakar, Professor of International Relations, Madras Christian College however doubted the operational robustness of the Chinese Navy.

Prabhakar pointed out that the Chinese Navy had not fought a war since 1969. He also dismissed the possibility of a full-fledged war between India and China citing the role of nuclear deterrence. He said that there was scope for a limited war particularly one targeting the cyberspace.

Prabhakar highlighted the strategic competition between both countries in regions stretching from the Pacific to West Asia. He noted that a Chinese railroad linking the Xinjiang with Tehran was China's response to India's project to construct the Chabahar port in Iran.



Oil spill cleanup on the Marina Beach kept tourists away for three weeks | UTSAV T

TANNU JAIN

Almost three weeks after two cargo ships collided causing a major oil spill in Chennai, the Marina beach looked just as it always did earlier. The beach, with the clean-up process complete for the day, showed no signs of the oil spill.

Tourists flocked to the beach wading into water unaware of the harm any residual oil might have. Some skin experts had revealed that the sludge could cause diseases like cancer if put in direct contact

with the skin.

As much as 20 tonnes of oil had been cleaned by volunteers from around the city. Students of marine engineering from GKM College had also been involved in the clean-up.

Some of them alleged that they had not been provided with any protective gear by the Corporation. They were forced to clean the beach using sacks as makeshift gloves.

Many mariners and environmentalists noted that the response to such disasters

was slow in India.

However, Corporation officials stated that around 300 workers from Greater Chennai Corporation had been working at the beaches.

The sludge has taken a toll on marine life as well and affected fishing business. However, with the completion of the clean up, normalcy has been restored. Most stalls on the beach have also reopened.

Even though the cleanup has been completed, a new issue has emerged with the disposal of the oil collected.

According to a report by The News Minute, some fishing hamlets have claimed that the oil has been dumped in sand pits. These pits they allege are so close to the water that high tides would take the oil back into the water.

Experts from the International Tanker Owners Pollution Federation (ITOPF) have said that if not cleaned properly, the oil could seep into power plants and desalination plants leading to contamination of the piping systems.

OPS: Hope still on

“No matter what, we will always be by his side,” say supporters of OPS

VAISHALI V.

Even though former Chief Minister O Panneerselvam seems to have lost the race to form the Government again, people continue to support.

Outside his residence on Greenways Road, R Pattammal, draped in a saree with a design of an AIADMK flag in it, kept shouting “We want OPS, We want OPS”. Pattammal, a resident of Chennai, has been there at Panneerselvam’s residence for a week to extend her support to him. “Some of my relatives from Andhra Pradesh have motivated me to participate in the campaign for our OPS. I am representing my entire family,” says Pattammal.

A lot of women cheering for OPS were among the crowd outside his residence. Some people were selling snacks and some were selling photos of former Chief Minister Jayalalitha, AIADMK founder M G Ramachandran and OPS. Some women had tattooed Jayalalitha’s image with OPS’s name written below it.

“We have gathered here to support OPS. We want OPS and Jayalalitha’s niece Deepa Jayakumar to come together and form the government because we think that the future of women would be better in their hands,” says K. Shakila, a resident of Virugambakkam.

The women believe that OPS are the heir of Jayalalitha because she had chosen only him as Chief Minister during her absence. They regret the way he was treated after



Cycle Kumar and MGR Jayaram in support of O.Panneerselvam | VAISHALI V.

J. Jayalalitha’s death and believe that he alone could hold the party together. Panneerselvam alleged that he was humiliated and forced to resign as Chief Minister by the Sasikala camp.

“We do not want the government to go into wrong hands. We are confident that the people want OPS to be the CM because he alone can lead the party well,” says, B.

Umayyal. Pamphlets made by V. Srinivasan, Youth Camp Secretary, were being distributed with “OPS-Original Public Service” written on them.

Two people from the crowd, Cycle Kumar and MGR Jayaram had a different way of showing their loyalty. They were dressed up in fancy costumes and their daily job earlier was to drive around in

autorickshaws to campaign for J. Jayalalitha. They say they will do the same for OPS.

“We have extended our loyalty to OPS and completely believe in him. He was chosen by J. Jayalalitha, and we respect the decision. This has been our sole occupation and our entire family is hard core AIADMK supporters,” they said.



M. G. Ramachandran lookalike outside O.Panneerselvam's house | UTSAV TIWARI

Chennai welcomes Sasikala DA verdict

PRUDHVI VEGESNA

The Supreme Court’s decision to uphold the conviction of AIADMK interim General Secretary VK Sasikala in the disproportionate assets case has been welcomed by many. Sekhar Babu, a shopkeeper from Kotturpuram said, “I am very happy with the judgement. This judgement is a slap on the face of the ‘Mannargudi Mafia’ which is trying to control the State. Finally, the truth has prevailed.”

M.Jambukeshwaran, a

Probationary officer at the State Bank of India Ambattur said, “Sasikala and her family tried to convert the AIADMK party into a family party.” Following the judgement, a sea of supporters thronged former Chief Minister O Panneerselvam’s Greenways Road residence and raised slogans against Sasikala. Panneerselvam had revolted after he alleged that he had been forced to resign to make way for Sasikala to take over as the Chief Minister.

R.Valarmathi from Mylapore

who works as a maid said, “I came here to give support to Panneerselvam after watching the judgement on the news channels. Amma’s blessings are here to save Panneerselvam and defeat Sasikala.”

P.Nanda Kumar, an advocate from Thiruvur district said, “Sasikala is a traitor. Sasikala wrote a letter to Amma saying that she would not enter politics. But now she and her family members are cheating Amma by entering into politics.”

Jayalalitha’s death, still a mystery?

UTSAV TIWARI

It has been more than two months since Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J. Jayalalitha died on December 5, 2016, yet rumours related to circumstances surrounding her death still remains.

A day after Tamil Nadu Chief Minister O.Panneerselvam tendered his resignation on February 5 2017, doctors from Apollo Hospital held a press conference facilitated by the Tamil Nadu government to end all the rumours.

Dr. Richard Beale, intensivist from the London Bridge Hospital, who was treating Jayalalitha, ruled out any conspiracy behind her death.

Beale said: “I am not from here. There was no conspiracy. She (Jayalalitha) had severe infection. She had supportive care.”

Dr. Shivani Upadhyaya, a physician, said “All their statements are very reasonable. If she was admitted with respiratory failure due to sepsis then this chain of events is totally expected. It’s not surprising that her heart failed.”

However, Panneerselvam, who accused AIADMK interim General Secretary V. K. Sasikala of forcing him to resign as Chief Minister, demanded a Supreme Court probe



PICTURE COURTESY: THE HINDU

to examine if there was any foul play leading to Jayalalitha’s death.

Jayalalitha’s doctor and an acupuncture specialist, Dr. M N Sanakar said in an interview to India Today that, “she was suffering from multiple medical issues, but impro-

ved ‘dramatically’ after he treated her.”

Demanding a probe into her death, he said that she would have been alive in his care.

G. Ratnam, an AIADMK member, said “They talk about a lot of

rumors, and even we don’t know about the whole story. Maybe if Panneerselvam comes up, he will make an effort to bring out the truth.”

According to a leaked email the Apollo management was quoted

saying the late Chief Minister was on “wrong diabetes medicines” before being hospitalised in September.

A report published Feb 04, 2012 in Tehelka said, “Jayalalitha was allegedly given sedatives and chemical substances that had small quantities of poison by a nurse appointed by Sasikala.”

Manoj Pandian, a former Rajya Sabha MP and an AIADMK leader held a press conference and said that, “We believe Amma (Jayalalitha) was poisoned. It is the truth. AIADMK cadres have not accepted Sasikala as their leader.”

“In fact, V. K. Sasikala is just the temporary general secretary of the AIADMK. Only 2,500 people who came to the general council appointed her.”

The rumors still surface on social media and people don’t have a clear idea about what to believe. “From her actions, we can tell Sasikala’s intentions. We get a lot of forwards on Whatsapp, but we aren’t clear ourselves,” said N. Jeevaratnam from Velacherry.

N.Nallakannan, an AIADMK supporter said, “It’s definitely Sasikala who did it. She did it to take away her assets. She didn’t let anyone in the hospital as she didn’t want us to see Amma’s state.”

DMK slams lack of governance

B. TILAK CHANDAR

DMK’s Working President M.K. Stalin has criticised the ruling AIADMK for engaging in power battle at the time of drought.

Addressing DMK members at a meeting held at the party headquarters, Stalin said “Tamil Nadu is facing water problem and farmers are committing suicide, but the ruling party has chosen to ignore the crisis and engage itself in power battle.” There was complete lack of governance, said Stalin. He added that because of instability in the government the people of Tamil Nadu were suffering.

The AIADMK members were fighting among themselves over who should become the Chief Minister instead of focussing on the severe drought and the suffering farmers. Reacting to AIADMK interim General Secretary V K Sasikala blaming the DMK for the crisis in her party, Stalin said it was ridiculous and a waste of time to consider her reaction.

Stalin added that the power struggle was rather to determine who will be more corrupt.

DMK supporter Vijayan, a

retired Government servant said that Tamil Nadu would not progress with such politics. Water problems and environmental degradation were important issues which the ruling party should have addressed.

Bhaskaran, a businessman and DMK supporter, said, “The people were earlier left in the dark over former Chief Minister Jayalalitha’s health and now there was this political uncertainty. DMK had the chance to win the next elections.” DMK Cadre and Advocate Hemant Annadurai, said that the governor had delayed the formation of the new Government as the Supreme Court judgement in the disproportionate case against Sasikala had been pending. He had the right to prolong the situation and call for floor test when necessary. V. Kannadasan, DMK Joint Secretary State Legal Wing and Advocate said, “People’s crisis was forgotten in the number games. Necessary action should be taken if the MLA’s were taken hostage.”

Mark.P, a retired police constable and DMK supporter, said, “People were confused over the situation and this would give DMK the chance to win the next assembly elections.”

Power tussle trickles to social media

SURBHI GUPTA

Social media was abuzz as the power struggle erupted in the AIADMK and was flooded with trolls, memes, jokes and comments by everyday users.

On AIADMK interim General Secretary V K Sasikala’s rise, the reaction of people was more of shock and amusement than a positive and encouraging one. One of the most used hashtags on the microblogging site, Twitter was #RIPTN.

A joke on the former Chief Minister, O. Panneerselvam (OPS) that became viral was: “OPS is the guy who likes sitting on the ladies seat of the MTC bus. Whenever a lady comes, he stands and if and when she leaves, he will sit.”

This referred to the previous three stints where O. Panneerselvam became the Chief Minister after J. Jayalalitha stepped down when she was convicted.

After the revolt of Panneerselvam, the AIADMK leadership sacked the head and deputy head of its IT wing, which is in charge of the party’s social media outreach.

The public battle went virtual with the two twitter handles @CMOTamilnadu and @AIADMKofficial, representing OPS and Sasikala respectively.

The first was not an official handle of the former Chief

Minister, but run by a loyalist. However later, it became the de facto handle of Camp OPS. Both the handles became popular among the users so much, that the party’s official handle @AIADMKofficial had to put out a tweet that @CMOTamilnadu was not the official handle of the chief minister of Tamil Nadu.

Some hashtags popular and trending on social media were #OPVsSasikala, #OPVsEPS.

The sacked deputy of the party’s IT wing, Hari Prabhakaran and team also posted the names and phone numbers of MLAs supporting Sasikala and asked the people to call the legislators and voice their opinion. This post went viral.

Trolls targeted the legislators who also received hundreds of phone calls, demanding that they take the ‘right decision’.

The effect was so monumental that then School Education Minister and Avadi MLA K. Pandiarajan tweeted: “How ethical is this harassment of every AIADMK MLA thro trolling & spurious telecalls for the past 48 hours? We have a right to our freedom!” Twitterati objected to his addressing Sasikala as ‘Chinnaamma’ and ‘Amma’ and many asked him to join the OPS camp.

Before joining the OPS camp, Pandiarajan later tweeted:

“Will surely listen to the collective voice of my voters & decide in a way to uphold the dignity of Amma’s memory & unity of AIADMK!” The response was overwhelming as hundreds of netizens praised his decision. In a week’s time, 12,900 new users followed him on twitter.

However, the mobile phones of other MLAs were ringing non-stop, which prompted them to switch off their phones or not take calls.

An audio clip of a woman voter from Srirangam was doing the rounds on WhatsApp. She called her constituency MLA and Minister S. Valarmathi, urged her to take a “good decision”.

“The party and symbol are important. OPS became a traitor once he lost the Chief Minister’s post,” was the Minister’s purported response. But the woman persisted: “I voted for you and I am pleading with you madam, not to take the wrong decision”. The MLA then cut the call.

Meanwhile, the ‘I support OPS’ campaign asking people to give a missed call to a particular number received over five lakh calls last week.

Panneerselvam thanked his supporters in a 38-second recorded message sent over a phone call. “Me, your OPS calling you,” he began and said that his public service would continue on the path shown by Jayalalitha.

SC Judgement a lesson: Stalin

B. TILAK CHANDAR

Justice delayed is justice denied but at least even after 20 years there is a closure to this case, said DMK spokesperson Manu Sundaram referring to the Supreme Court’s verdict upholding the trial court’s conviction of AIADMK interim General Secretary V K Sasikala in the Disproportionate Assets case.

Sundaram said the trial court Judge John Michael D’Cunha’s order spoke volumes about the corruption indulged by former Chief Minister Jayalalitha and Sasikala.

“Jayalalitha may be dead and her sentence stands abated but she is not absolved of her crimes,” said Manu Sundaram. Referring to the telecom scam in which members of the DMK have been accused, Sundaram said members of the DMK were facing cases filed against them, but no DMK ‘leader’ had

been convicted by a court of law,

DMK Working President M.K. Stalin reacting to the verdict said that after 21 years justice had been served and praised the trial court judgement. “It is an important and landmark judgement. This judgement has set the precedent for how politicians should conduct themselves in public life,” he said.

Stalin added that the judgement showed that even if there was a delay, corrupt politicians could not get away and it was a lesson for politicians.

Stalin said, “One must not forget that Jayalalitha was also convicted in the case. She was the accused number one and Sasikala was the second accused. She and Sasikala amassed wealth when Jayalalitha was the Chief Minister and Sasikala was behind the mask of Jayalalitha.

AU students' future at stake

SOMDYUTI DATTA RAY

The empty Vice Chancellor's seat in Anna University will put the career of recent graduates in jeopardy if they cannot produce a valid degree certificate signed by the Vice Chancellor in time.

Former Vice Chancellor R Radhakrishnan-- was sentenced to five-year imprisonment in November in a bribery case. The post has been lying vacant since then. As such, there is no one to sign the degree certificates either.

Although provisional certificates were given to students, they are valid for only six months. Students with job offers, and few who have already started working, are being asked to submit their degree certificate.

"I graduated last year and started working immediately. I had requested an extension for my degree certificate, but our organisation is now pressuring me to submit it soon," said Malini Ray, an alumna.

A few of her classmates were equally stressed, she added. Twenty-two year-old Nikhil S is facing a similar dilemma. After months of job-hunting, he has finally received a job offer from a Delhi-based software firm. "I don't feel relieved yet. The provisional



Anna university campus | ANNA UNIVERSITY

certificate expires in two months. What if they pull my offer if I can't give them a degree certificate?" he wondered.

Anna University, which usually hosts its annual convocation in December, has not announced any dates yet for the batch that

graduated. Distribution of the degree certificates has been put on hold too until further notice.

"I let go of a job offer because of the university's uncertainty," said Kalyan (23). "They were expecting me to submit all the documents and start immediately," he added.

Engineering students to improve Railway safety

VARUN DIXIT

Final year students of S.A. Engineering College have developed a robot to detect cracks on railway tracks and send safety warning through text messages.

Kulandayan, a final year Electronics and Communication department student who was a part of the three man team that built the robot, said "the number of train accidents has resulted in many deaths over the decades and we have designed this model so that we can assist in making Indian railway more safe and secure."

Kulandayan said "The working of our module is not at all intricate; a light-sensing module becomes active as soon as the crack is detected by a microcontroller and a message is sent to the local station through a mobile application which is a part of model."

"Professors of the Electronics and Communication department assisted us in this project and the project wouldn't have been a success without the support of industry experts who visited the college frequently," Kulandayan added.

Southern Railway boasts of a large train network and most of the tracks in the network are old and outdated which act as an obstacle to the smooth operation of trains and often results in speed restrictions.



Joints are where cracks are most likely to develop | DEPOSITPHOTOS

Southern Railway tied up with IIT-Madras to develop an ultrasound equipment to detect rail fracture. This crack detection model developed by S.A. Engineering college can prove to be a valuable addition for Southern Railway.

However the equipment has to pass different stages before it is put

to use by the Indian Railways. Principal of S.A. Engineering college Dr. P.K. Nagarajan said "For real time implementation a detailed report will be prepared by the Head of the department of Electronics and Communication and then we will take a proposal to the Southern Railway for its approval".

"We focus on academics in the first two years of the college but once the student adapts to the curriculum of the course we encourage them to do such innovative activities as our institution believes in nurturing talent and for that we are having lot of programs in the college," he added.

Thiruvottiyur drowned in water crisis

U.M. ABHIJITH

Residents of Thiruvottiyur are facing water shortage even though water tanks damaged by the Cyclone Vardah in December have been repaired.

A number of houses are yet to receive water connection. Even in the houses which have a connection, the supply is not regular. The Chennai Metro Water Supply and Sewerage Board provided water only once in three days, alleged Kalavati, a resident of Neidhal Nagar in Thiruvottiyur.

While several houses receive water through pipeline connection the others get it from the water supplied through lorries.

CMWSSB's Area Engineer for Thiruvottiyur, Tamim Iqbal said that water was provided through pipelines for two hours in a day. "There are several households where the pipelines could not be laid. We provide them water through tanker lorries," he said.

But Sundaram, a resident of Saraswati Nagar in Thiruvottiyur, said, "Water in tankers do not come on a regular basis. Sometimes we will have to wait for hours. We cannot rely solely on that. Many residents are skeptical of the quality



Water tank at Thiruvottiyur | U.M. ABHIJITH

of corporation water and do not use it for drinking. They buy water cans. Balakrishnan, a bakery owner said, "I buy drinking water in 10 litre cans. Corporation water is not fit for drinking."

But Tamim said that the water came directly from the Minjur

desalination plant. "This is safer to drink than the water that people buy," he added.

About the damage caused to the water tanks by Cyclone Vardah, Tamim said, "There was a disruption in supply for a few days but we managed to restore it soon."

Encroachments plague Kodambakkam road

U.M. ABHIJITH

A plea has been entered in the Madras High Court for a direction to the Corporation of Greater Chennai to remove all encroachments on the Kodambakkam High Road.

The road is crowded with vehicles almost the entire part of the day.

But the width of the road is insufficient to accommodate these much vehicles. On either sides there are shops, many of them encroaching into the road.

On many parts of the road, there are no footpaths, as there are buildings immediately close to the road.

Neeraj, a student who travels daily through this road said, "With no proper footpath in some parts of the road, it becomes difficult for the pedestrians like us."

The lack of proper width for the road, in accordance with the number of vehicles passing by, has led to many accidents.

Several small scale shops are situated on the road. Some of the shops will be removed if the Corporation clears these encroachments.



A crowded road at Kodambakkam | U.M. ABHIJITH

Manoharan, who has been running a small hotel for the past 40 years, said that his livelihood would be affected if the corporation was forced to act by the high court.

According to the Krishna Das, a bakery owner, "The Corporation has been talking about widening of road for many years, but no action has been taken so far." He is planning to reduce the size of the shop if the road is widened.

Venkatesh, who has given his building for rent, said, "I constructed this building 30 years

ago with the approval from Corporation. If they are going to demolish even part of it, proper compensation should be paid."

S Parthiban of Saidapet filed Public Interest Litigation as the Corporation was taking no action despite repeated complaints.

The PIL came up for a hearing last week before the First Bench comprising Chief Justice SK Kaul and Justice M Sundar who ordered notice returnable by March 2.

Greater Chennai Corporation is yet to take an action on this issue.

Health drive in city schools

TANNU JAIN

The second phase of deworming among school children conducted by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, the Education Department, ICDS and the Department of Rural Development ended on 15 February.

Started in 2015 the program aims to de-worm all children in the age group of 1 to 19 years in order to reduce the incidence infections due to Soil Transmitted Helminths (STH).

As per WHO directives, the students were given Albendazole (400 mg) tablets to reduce worm infestation. The tablet has no side effects, but if adulterated medicines are given the children might be in danger of diseases like diarrhoea, said Dr Sanjay Jain, a Delhi based physician.

Studies have shown that the diseases transmitted due to worms are the biggest cause for anemia and malnourishment among school going children. The headmistress of Olcott Memorial Higher Secondary School, J Lalitha said "420 kids were given the tablets."

The drive also aims to give students guidelines regarding cleanliness. Instructions on using toilets, washing hands and vegetables and fruits were given by the teachers at the school.

At the Arignar Anna Government Higher Secondary School, the tablets were administered to 320 children. K Gauri who is in charge said, "I myself instructed the students regarding cleanliness."

One reason for the drive focusing on cleanliness is that the Soil-transmitted helminth infections are transmitted by eggs present in the human feces which contaminate soil in poorly sanitized areas.

"This is a huge problem in India and a major contributor to malnutrition and anemia. Tamil Nadu is a high prevalence state," said health advisor, Dr Jaya Shreedhar.

As per the fourth National Health Family Survey, 50.7% of children aged 6 to 59 months and 55.1% of the women 15 to 49 in Tamil Nadu are anemic. The city medical officer, Dr Sheela Gobinath however refused to comment citing sensitivity of the issue.

Culture of silence and pre-conditioning

VAISHALI V

The recent sexual assault on and the murder of 7-year-old Hasini at Mugalivakkam has triggered fear among parents over the safety of their children.

Andrew Sesuraj, State Convener, Tamil Nadu Child Rights Observatory said that the state had progressed only a little in dealing with child abuse compared to the magnitude of the problem. Although there were many nongovernmental organizations working for children they could only propose models and not replace the government's role.

The government had to involve them and make sure that all the issues concerning children were properly recognized, he added.

However, reporting of child abuse is still considered a shame especially when it is committed by own family members.

"The process of coming out continues to be a struggle considering the future of the child, family honor and the fear of embarrassment in society. This can end only if the system becomes more sensitive towards these

issues. Police stations are somehow still in a denial mode and do not want to understand the depth of this issue," said Andrew Sesuraj.

Some commonly committed mistakes after reporting the crime had been avoided. The perpetrator should not be allowed to talk to the victim after the crime, the victim cannot be examined physically by the police and the crime should be reported immediately to the child welfare number, he added.

Experts said that support from parents and a conducive environment were crucial.

The minute parents tried to suppress the thoughts of child, he or she got psychologically disturbed for the rest of their lives leaving a scar on their self confidence. The awareness must reach the urban as well as rural pockets of society equally. All schools must be open to conducting workshops on prevention of child abuse.

Most of the child abuse cases don't get reported and the child knows the abuser and if carefully noticed, these abusers show a pattern in behavior.

"Bad intention is worse than



PAMIR TIMES

primary assault. The victim gets lost in the system between the public prosecutor and the accused," says Ms Vidya Reddy, executive director of Tulir, Centre for the Prevention and Healing Child Sexual Abuse.

Most child abusers were viewers of child pornography and about 95 per cent of them chose their landscape before committing a sexual offence.

"People think that child sexual abuse prosecutions involve physical evidence but very few cases involve eye witness testimony. With technological development, most abusers contact their victim through social media," she added.

Andrew Sesuraj said "A criminal has to be punished and an offender has to be corrected. Some amount of counseling should be given to both the perpetrator and the victim. Mental well being is the least considered and discussed part with respect to this issue. It has to be brought to the surface and people should come out of their shells of conservativeness."

CHILDLINE India Foundation: 1098.

Changing face of V-day

SOUFYAJIT MANDAL

With a soothing romantic melody playing in the background, a couple holds hands and peers into shop windows decked in customary Valentine's day colours of red, white and pink at Phoenix Market City Mall in Velachery.

What was once seen as a primarily Western phenomenon, has slowly taken over the imagination of the Indian middle classes. Restaurants are decorated with ribbons and flowers while malls go to the great extent of making huge displays made with heart shaped balloons.

But the day wasn't always about splurging away and showering gifts on your loved one.

The day has its roots in the Roman celebration of Lupercalia. It was an ancient possibly pre-Roman pastoral festival, observed in the middle of February, to purify the city, releasing fertility and health while averting evil spirits. On that day men between the age of 20 and 40, sacrificed goats and dogs, fashioned whips and thongs from the freshly flayed skin of the animals and ran through the streets whipping anyone that came in their way, including women. To be struck by the whip was considered as a sign of fertility.

However the name Valentine



Heart shaped photo frames for valentined day | SONAKSHI A

came to be associated with the celebration as Emperor Claudius II in the 3rd century A.D., according to legend, executed a few men named Valentine on the same day, February 14.

Despite our ignorance about the men, except their names, tall tales of unrequited love and estranged

lovers have been assigned to them. Finally it was Chaucer who set the date as February 14, with his poem 'The Parliament of Fowls.' In it, birds declare their love for each other on this date.

With so many origins, alterations, additions and substitutions, the origin of the day

is hard to keep track of. When asked how she thinks Valentine's Day started, Shweta Tiwari recalls what she had seen in a movie, 'I thought it all started when Saint Valentine, was beheaded because it was against the law for a soldier to marry a woman.

Why should people show their

love on a single day when they should be doing so every day of the year?

Vijay N. said, 'With our busy work schedules and hectic lifestyles, it's easier to have a whole day dedicated to your loved one.'

Should Indians be celebrating what is mostly a Western practice? Arjun said, 'India being a secular country should be tolerant of all religions and religious practices, be it Hindu, Muslim or Christian.'

Arjun said, 'Even if Valentine's day is not a religious celebration it is still important to have a day to show your loved one that you care.'

Recently a Pakistan court banned the observance of Valentine's Day in the country labelling it an indecent and immoral celebration.

In India, Right-wing activists have come out in protest of the Valentine's day celebration, calling it a symbol of Western vulgarity and decadence.

Despite these obstacles, Valentine's Day has slowly evolved into a gargantuan celebration fuelled by booming sales, and soaring prices.

But all that is unlikely to drive away determined lovers, hell-bent on professing their love more to the world than to their better halves.

State on top in NPTEL

TSHERING DORJI

Tamil Nadu remains on the top in the field of online study platforms as many as NPTEL (National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning) applicants were from the State in 2016-2017.

Science students, science teachers and IT professionals from across the state are taking up courses relevant to their field of study to enhance their knowledge and expertise.

"It provides a tool to a better understanding of the subject aside from the class room learning," said Lijith Nambiar, an M.Tech at IITM (Indian Institute of Technology Madras).

Nambiar said that an introductory course in intellectual property for engineers and technologists has given him a better understanding of how to preserve property rights.

According to a report in The Times of India, NPTEL has completed 130 courses this year, where 40 percent of applicants were from the state.

"A faculty crunch in several engineering colleges in inter parts of TN is a big factor contributing to these kinds of

numbers," according to its report.

For instance, Basic development Circuit, Sustainable River Basin Management, Programming, data structures and algorithms and

"It provides a tool to a better understanding of the subject aside from the class room learning,"

practical English, Learning and Teaching were among the 130 courses.

"I took practical English, learning and teaching course. It has bolstered my teaching skills," said Sakees Tensing, an English tutor who gives private lessons.

Ravi Tega, a Civil engineering student of Anna University, said "It is useful. I have been going through whatever courses I need."

Experts from various colleges including IITM have been creating videos and web content courses.

On the beach



A balloon seller gets snapped on the beach at Besant Nagar | UTSAV T

TN mulls ban on cab-sharing

SOMDYUTI DATTA RAY

The ongoing Ola and Uber strike in Delhi-NCR has left commuters here distressed with reports earlier this month hinting that the Tamil Nadu Government might ban of Ola and Uber's ride-sharing service. However there is no official confirmation yet, of the ban.

After Karnataka banned the popular car-pooling service last month, the Tamil Nadu Transport Department was thinking about discontinuing it.

Under Tamil Nadu Motor Vehicle Act (1989), contract carriages like omnibuses, auto rickshaws and taxis are not permitted to pick up or drop passengers at different locations during a trip, as done by Ola and Uber sharing services. According to the Act, they can only pick up passengers from one point and drop them at another.

A committee was set up to frame a set of rules, and send them to Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways for approval of the ban. Until then, Ola Share and Uber Pool will continue to operate in the State.

But this brings little respite to the users of Chennai, especially since Ola and Uber drivers in Delhi-NCR have been protesting for a week demanding price-hike and halt to sharing-service.

"When the drivers themselves are demanding a ban on Ola and Uber share, what choice do we have left?" asks A. Viswanathan,

who frequently opts for taxi-pooling.

Taxi-pooling is not only 20-40 percent cheaper than individual rides, it also helps in reducing the traffic congestion and pollution.

"A personal cab to my workplace usually charges Rs. 200; it costs me around Rs. 140 when I take Uber Pool," says Shalini Mishra.

"Individual rides are not always



| FEWINGS CARTOONS

affordable," she adds.

But cab drivers are of different opinion. According to Saravana Kumar, an Uber driver, his earnings have fallen since the share-service was introduced. "I get more share passengers than individual ones. It may be pocket-friendly to them, but not enough for me to pay off my car loan," he says.

Kerala and Odisha have also been considering banning it in their states.

Although Karnataka implemented the ban, Uber Pool continues to operate in most of the areas of Bengaluru..

A rural-urban festivity



Dance performance at Urur-Olcott Kupam fest | SONAKSHI A

SONAKSHI AWASTHI-

Taking Carnatic music to deprived classes, the Urur Olcott Kupam Vizha celebrated its third.

Urur Olcott Kupam is a fishermen village located at the far end of the Elliot's Beach. On February 10 and 11, the village witnessed a Carnatic music concert by T.M. Krishna.

"The idea is how to make marginal life and non-marginal lives meet on an equal platform," said T.M. Krishna.

The organizers of the event set the ball rolling by leading a percussion procession into the narrow lanes of the village. Around 30 people marched behind the kanjira and shehnai players as people watched them. The musical procession came to an end on the beach.

Red, green and blue lights brought the stage to life on the moonlit beach. The event included fisherfolk melodies by children of the village, Kuchipudi dance performances and Tamil rock

music performed by Kurangan.

Archana, one of the organizers, said, "There are different art forms and there is a distinction between art and folk. We want to bring a connection between the two so that all are able to access the art. This is to equalize all kinds of places and art forms."

Referring to the village and its people, Vandana, one of the organizers, said, "The fishermen find themselves alienated from the art and we want to bring art out of the confined places."

Local city bus services on a decline

SUMEDHA GROVER

The number of Metropolitan Transport Corporation (MTC) buses plying on a certain route is adjusted depending the floating population in the area. This has led to a decline in bus services in certain areas in South Chennai.

According to residents of Besant Nagar the frequency of buses has seen a continuous over the last few months.

"We have to go to the Besant Nagar Bus Depot to catch a bus because very few bus routes pass through the area. Even there we have to wait for 10-15 minutes on average," says Anisha Reddy who travels to Mount Road for work most days.

Only 29 buses ply from the Depot compared to the 91 which ply from the nearby Adyar Bus Terminus and about 140 from the Thiruvanniyur Bus Depot.

"Besant Nagar is what we call a dead end. It is a residential area and acts as an end point more often than



Buses lined up at Thiruvanniyur depot | SUMEDHA GROVER

not. There is nowhere else people go from there.

Thiruvanniyur on the other hand is a junction of sorts which explains the higher number of buses in the area," said T. Bennet Rajan,

Assistant Manager, Planning and --Development Department, MTC.

Shekhar Bharat, who works at a firm in Pallavaram, said "I moved to Besant Nagar only two months

ago and I am already looking for a house in a different area.

Travelling anywhere from here is difficult if you don't have your own vehicle because public transport is too time consuming.

There is no direct connectivity and I end up waiting for 20-25 minutes everyday."

MTC monitors the number of passengers on each bus on a daily and weekly basis.

This data helps in determining which routes need additional services.

"We can't add more buses to the fleet. For that government funding is required. So we reallocate the number of buses plying on certain routes depending upon the demand," added Rajan.

There are just over 4000 buses for 32 depots across Chennai which include single decker (1806), semi low floor (1538) and small buses (210) among others.

The most populated depots are CMBT (Chennai Mofussil Bus Terminus) with over 2000 buses plying daily,

Broadway which is a stop on almost 500 bus routes and Tambaram (including seven bus depots) which falls on 287 route.

Bhim struggles

SOUFYAJIT MANDAL

The Central Government's newly launched Bhim (Bharat Interface for Money) app which was geared to make online transactions fast and easy is not widely known or trusted.

Consumers and businesses alike, are reluctant to embrace the app, some due to lack of awareness, others due to dependence on alternative e-wallet services.

Vishal, a bookshop owner, says his customers haven't even heard of the app. "What is the use of having it if others don't even know about it? None of my customers use the app" he says.

Rajshri, an interior designer says she has heard of the app, but hasn't found the need to use it. She says, "Most of my transactions are through card, cash or other e-wallet services. I don't really see the need to instal it on my phone."

The Bhim app is unique as it allows the user to directly link their bank account through their mobile

number. As opposed to other e-wallet services, its simpler and more convenient.

However, your mobile number needs to be registered with your existing bank account, otherwise the system fails to detect your account.

Abhineet Sharma, an IT professional based in Delhi says he has used the app and is more than satisfied with it. "It's very simple and easy to use. You don't need to fill too many fields. Just enter your mobile number and it directly links your account. For an app developed by the government it's really brilliant. So what if it has a few bugs or glitches here and there. For a government app it fulfills its purpose," he says.

Recently the app was launched on the iOS platform, giving access to iPhone users. Though the number of people owning an iPhone in India is small, the group is highly coveted as they spend more.