

- INSIDE**
- Short 'N' Snappy
 - Biden's Madras connection
 - N. Sankar at 75
 - The future of Mega Cities
 - The Magnificent Trio

MADRAS MUSINGS

www.madrasmusings.com WE CARE FOR MADRAS THAT IS CHENNAI
 Vol. XXX No. 11 November 16-30, 2020

Garbage Collection – a new beginning?

Chennai is preparing itself for a new garbage collection agency. Urbaser Sumeet is a Spanish firm and it has been awarded the contract for solid waste management for eight years, effective October 1. The equipment that the company brings sounds impressive. To quote the *Indian Express*, there will be “125 compactors, 38 mechanical sweepers, 3,000 e-rickshaws for waste collection and 11,000 compactor dustbins with 10,844 staff.” The new team has begun taking over in a phased manner the seven zones in which it is to operate. It is early days but much is expected of the contractor, especially in the light of Chennai ranking very poorly in the Swacch ratings – the city was third, from the bottom.

There are however plenty of challenges ahead. Thus far, no private agency that has been entrusted with Chennai's

garbage collection has had a happy relationship with the Corporation. Most have departed under a cloud, the latest being Ramky Enviro Engineers, which was accused of dressing up figures of garbage collected at various wards, the company being paid on the basis of the weight of refuse brought in each day. In order to avoid such situations, the new incumbent will be evaluated across 34 parameters, an independent consultant being in charge of

● by The Editor

this. Payment will be made based on performance. Some of the key indices, to quote from the *Indian Express* again, include “primary collection, street sweeping and collection, secondary collection and transportation and complaint redressal within six hours (ex-

cept redressal of complaints for replacement or retrofitting of assets which may be done within 24 hours).”

It all sounds very impressive on paper. But the biggest challenge this agency is going to face will be from the Chennai residents – as a community we are averse to any discipline when it comes to garbage disposal. We are very particular that our residences remain free of garbage and beyond that we do not bother. This is the reason why most households have been reluctant to practise waste segregation at source. The household (and in this we include commercial, industrial and often health) rubbish is simply carted to the nearest roadside bin and thrown all around it – it being considered unhygienic to actually tip the

(Continued on page 2)

The Heritage of our Garbage



Our Old, taken ten years ago, features a collection bin placed by whichever agency then was clearing our streets of garbage. Our Not So New shows a bin placed by Ramky Enviro, the

agency that till recently was clearing the streets of waste. Our New shows the new bins placed by Urbaser Sumeet, the new contractor. The garbage has remained more or less a constant, for which it is we the citizens who are to blame.

COVID's impact on affordable healthcare

Like most public crises, the pandemic has impacted the poor and the marginalised more than the stronger sections of society. Philanthropic organisations play a key role in helping the vulnerable through these difficult times, ensuring their access to essential goods, services and care. Chennai's not-for-profit medical institutions are doing a stellar job in this regard, even as they adapt to the 'new normal' where costs are on the rise, operational planning is more complex, and finances are crunched.

Akila Ganesan of the Sankara Nethralaya Eye Hospital recalled the initial challenges that the hospital faced when the pandemic struck in March. “The safety of our patients and employees was our immediate concern. We quickly defined standard operating procedures for each individual activity and

department and established protocols for patient care,” she explained. Financials were also a challenge, as the salaries of employees had to be met even as patient footfalls decreased. “We're a single specialty hospital, so many of our procedures are elective, not emergency.

● by Our Special Correspondent

Consequently, revenues have taken a hit. In parallel, expenses have also gone up with increased spending on safety measures like PPE kits, masks and sanitisers,” she said. Sankara Nethralaya has received generous support from its donors, many of whom came forward to fund the procurement of equipment and safety items.

Like Sankara Nethralaya, other non-profit medical institutions have received immense support from donations in these times. Take VHS Hospital, for instance. The hospital receives a government grant but depends largely on public and corporate donations to keep going. It has quickly adapted to the new needs brought forth by the pandemic, a feat that Dr. Suresh credits to the charitable donations that continue to flow in. “Some major donors pitched in with timely help. We were able to immediately source the equipment needed to face the covid crisis, such as CPAP machines,” he said.

It's not just capital expenditure that donors have helped with. While one-time donations help procure equipment, there's still the cost of maintenance, which can run into

(Continued on page 2)

Garbage Collection – a new beginning?

(Continued from page 1)

waste into it. Most often than not, the bins are unapproachable, they being surrounded by garbage (see page 1 – The Heritage of our Garbage). In other instances, the bins are overturned by foraging cattle and so are unusable unless someone sets them right back on their base, which none of our residents will do.

It is in this scenario that Urbaser Sumeet has committed to implementing 100 per cent waste segregation at source within a year. It plans to get its waste collection team to educate residents and get them to begin practising this discipline. Towards this end, the agency will collect segregated waste at source, in different bins and then transfer them to roadside bins from where they will be taken away and handed over to the

Corporation. There are two loopholes in this. Firstly, the roadside bins will continue to be present and this is the beginning of all indiscipline – residents and others will keep tossing unsegregated waste in and around these, as they can then be free of the task of sifting their garbage. All talk of identifying offenders and punishing them is hollow as we don't have the means of detection and even if we do, collection of fines in India is an iffy process.

The best option would have been to remove all roadside bins and force people to collect and segregate garbage at source. Secondly, does our Corporation have the wherewithal to handle segregated garbage? This is highly doubtful. The Spanish agency is therefore aiming for perfection in a process where both the start and end points are quite vague. Let us hope for the best.

Medical sector & Covid

(Continued from page 1)

lakhs for specialised machines. Then there are operational costs to cover. Apart from the PPE kits, hospitals are facing increased labour cost in response to the risk of working at medical facilities during a pandemic. Nurses, housekeeping staff and other workers expect increased salaries as hazard pay and insurance too. "The government had already passed a minimum wage act before the pandemic struck, which had raised labour cost by more than 40 per cent," explained Dr. Suresh. "Further increases followed the pandemic. It's a hard act to balance – on one hand, we have to pay our employees; on the other, we have to keep the cost of care affordable for our patients." NGOs like Bhumika have stepped forward to help patients subsidise the cost of investigation such as lab tests, allowing hospitals like VHS to continue to offer their services. In Sankara Nethralaya's case, philanthropy has allowed them to perform 25 per cent of their surgeries free of cost even in these times.

Technology has been a huge boon as well. "Sankara Nethralaya is a pioneer in tele-ophthalmology in India," said Akila. "We are reaching out to our patient base through tele consultation and tele counselling." At VHS, What's App is quite popular. "Patients can send us pictures of the pulse oxymeter reading on What's App, and we respond immediately," said Dr. Suresh, giving an example of how they use the app. Online consultation processes are

important during a pandemic – they help hospitals treat patients who need care while ensuring that in-patient resources are utilised only for those who require in-person care. This is crucial for hospitals like VHS, which treat covid-affected patients in quarantine facilities.

Looking to the future, Akila worries about the unpredictability of the situation. "When will normalcy be restored? No one has an answer to this question. We're continuing to strengthen protocols and shore up funds through cost-cutting measures as well as donor outreach campaigns. We're doing our best to ensure that we can continue to service the community with free care," she said.

Dr. Suresh had some additional points here. "Post-covid healthcare protocol is the need of the hour," he said. "For instance, covid positive patients are reporting high blood sugar. Is it going to remain high? Post-covid care research is crucial." The VHS Hospital's research team has already begun work on such research and expect to publish a few papers soon.

Dr. Suresh's positivity towards the future is driven in no small part by the philanthropic help that the hospital has received in tough times. "The amount of community support that we have received has been phenomenal," he said. "I am happy that I am in Chennai, where there is always a helping hand when you need one. One has to just do their job sincerely and there are people to help you."

Joe Biden, the Tamilian

The US is to shortly have a new President, provided the present incumbent makes way. The new Vice-President is a woman who has a Madras connect and, the city, so *The Man from Madras Musings* notes, has made much out of it. Uncles, aunts and distant relatives have begun crawling out of the woodwork. Some artistes put together a cringe-worthy message wishing her all the best. It is still early days, and more will come sooner than later. Our party in power, with its legacy of women in leadership was first off to congratulate. The Leader of the Opposition too added his best wishes. It of course remains to be seen if the lady in question acknowledges Madras or Chennai in her growth story. There are some who dismiss that single reference to aunts in Madras in a speech as a mere electoral stunt.

But what is surprising is the way the city began to look upon President-elect Biden as a forgotten son or something equivalent to that. It all began with an innocuous statement made by the man in 2013 or so, to the effect that he was descended of a George Biden who worked for the East India Company and married an Indian woman (does this mean the President-elect has Indian blood? After all he did not say that George Biden had another wife who was an accidental from whom his line was descended). Then in August this year came an article by a Professor in England who wrote on Christopher Biden in Madras and surmised that he could have been the ancestor. We don't think so and for further details please see page 4 of this issue. It is during moments like these that MMM misses the Old Chief, who would have immediately established not one but several links between Joe and other forms of Biden and Madras. But be that as it may, there is no way a George could have become Christopher. Another aspect that is conveniently overlooked is that President-elect Biden is a Catholic, which Christopher definitely was not. He has after all a memorial to himself at St. George's Cathedral.

But these are all matters of minor detail when a city has decided that it IS related to him. As soon as the news broke of him winning, the article dating to August was dusted and aired on most social media platforms. MMM received it almost a hundred times with a query asking whether it was true. MMM wishes he had an answer. And now to add to the confusion, this issue of MM too has a story on the subject. But what was interesting was the way the story of namma Joe's connect to namma Chennai grew within 24 hours. In the

morning it was more a question of whether it was true but by afternoon it had become one of absolute certainty. One Tamil channel spoke of Biden Sr walking on the Marina, conveniently overlooking the fact that there was no beach in the 1850s. Then came an avalanche of WhatsApp forwards – first of just the memorial stone at St. George's and then of a portrait of Biden Sr, then a pic of the cathedral and then all of these together by way of a collage.

But what took the cake was a WhatsApp forward worth quoting verbatim –

"Though America Voted Its New President Mr Joe Biden not many people know that his great grandfather Mr Christopher Biden served as the Chief Magistrate of Madras city for many year in the 1840s. He is remembered with a plaque at the CSI St Georges Cathedral Chennai picture year 1848".

SHORT 'N' SNAPPY



This text was accompanied by the attached pic above. MMM does not know who the man standing by is and in the absence of any other information assumes it is 'Christopher', Joe Biden's ancestor, standing by the side of his memorial plaque. Anyway, with a name like Christopher, the man can only be Tamil. So, move over Kamalambal Harris. But what MMM cannot make out is how a Joe Biden, who is 78 this year, could have had a great grandfather who died in 1858.

The Monsoon came, saw and went

As is usual at this time of the year, the city is eagerly looking up at the sky and indulging in its hobby of cloud spotting. The weathermen have made their usual vague predictions – we could have a bountiful monsoon, on the other hand there is this, that and the other to be considered and on the basis of that, this and the other, we could have a moderate monsoon or none at all. And then there came a night when all weather channels predicted clear skies only to have clouds arriving en-mass, lightning flashing, thunder pealing non stop and rain coming down in buckets.

By early next morning, the city was back to its other hobby – complaining about the rain and waterlogging. Mind you, *The Man from Madras Musings* is not finding fault with the city complaining about waterlogging. The citizens pay their taxes (at least some do) and so expect some modicum of repair to ensure the roads remain free of water after rains. But then this is Chennai – we are never prepared for flood or drought and have still managed for over 375 years.

The next and perhaps most unexpected development was an sms from the authorities – stay at home it said, for the rains were going to be torrential and only a Noah would make bold to step out. This was probably from the same department that sent out notifications to schools asking them to shut down each time it rained in those happy days when schools meant live classes and not horrible sessions online. Anyway, whatever it was or whoever it was that sent the sms to MMM and others, it had the desired effect – the rain stopped and has after that not returned to Chennai, except for some showers a few days later.

That has since brought to an abrupt halt all of those screaming about the waterlogging. MMM notices that the leader of this pack, rather like Abou Ben Adhem is our beloved Leader of the Opposition, who is forever flaying the Government for something or the other. MMM does not hold any brief for the current administration but this he can say with confidence – when it comes to protecting the drainage heritage of the city, both the party in power and the one in the opposition share honours equally. It flooded then, it floods now and it will flood in future. MMM for one takes those pronouncements of those in office about completion of flood mitigation programmes in the city with a large lump of salt. We will need to live with this. But then, we may have to get used to it also, for climate change specialists are anyway predicting a rise in ocean levels and our city is in the front line of risk when it comes to flooding that way. Looking at the matter from both sides, we are bound to get flooded.

Those brief hours of rain had some of our social media lions roaring to their fullest. There were the usual laments about vanished lakes, buildings constructed on water bodies, cutting of trees, relaying of roads at repeatedly higher levels and corruption in high places. Thereafter, when it stopped raining, everyone went back, to encroaching on lakes, constructing on water bodies, cutting trees, watching roads being relaid at repeatedly higher levels and getting work done via corruption in high places.

–MMM

OUR READERS WRITE



The Beach House

I am always fascinated and even now by this building – what a location. When I came down to Chennai after retirement in 1999, I saw this in a dilapidated condition. I brought this to the notice of Mr. Muthiah. He perhaps spoke to some-

one and it was slightly repaired and whitewashed. Later I spoke to the then Principal and told her to convert it into her official residence – a fantastic location on the beach. She told me she might use it as a classroom. I also felt that the DGP who was opposite could use it as a Police

● Pavithra's Perspective

The Bridge to Nowhere



When at around three o'clock one balmy afternoon (when is it not balmy in Chennai?) I phoned my friend and mentioned my location, his horrified shriek nearly deafened my ear.

"You're where?"

"The Broken Bridge. The one that just ... stops in the middle. The one which comes in all those movies. You know, in *Adyar* –"

"I know," he snapped. Then, after a pause. "And you're all alone?"

"Yes."

"Are you insane? Leave that place at once!"

It took ten more minutes to convince him that it was bright daylight and I was fine; there really was no one about at that hour. Not that I didn't understand his concern; all the bottles strewn around made it extremely clear that the place was the popular haunt of "time-passers." But his anxiety wasn't just about local blokes – it was about dead ones too.

For, *Adyar's Broken Bridge* has the reputation of being haunted.

As I stood at the edge and stared at the river sparkling in the late afternoon sun, the grassy verges that seemed miraculously devoid of garbage, the fluffy clouds, and the buildings rising hazily in the distance, it seemed idyllic. And rather difficult to believe that at a little distance, on October 24, 1746, the French East India Company and the Nawab of Arcot had fought each other in the Battle of *Adyar*.

Perhaps that's where all the ghosts came from. Either way, this was a site that ought to be preserved, not just on celluloid, but paper too. Which I did.

Description: 3.5" by 5" approximately
Medium: Black and White Micron Pens:
0.20mm and 0.35mm.

Club. I was feeling sadly that it might disappear one night.

Leading advocate N.L. Rajah tells me that he has filed a PIL in the Madras High Court for its conservation.

Dr. G. Sundaram, IAS (R)
A-601, "DUGAR Apartments"
Keshav Perumal Puram
Greenways Road
Chennai 600 028

Remembering Ms. Savithri Vaithi

This refers to the article by Smt Kamala Rangachari, Managing Trustee of the Vishranti Charitable Trust offering tributes to late Ms. Savithri Vaithi, the founder of the renowned old age home for women Vishranti in Chennai ("Savithri Vaithi attains Vishranthi," MM, November 1st). This article has detailed the various hardships faced by Savithri Vaithi apart from the efforts taken for establishing this Home for the aged women as early as in the year 1978. It was revealed that this home had its beginning with the blessings of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam Shri Maha Periaava Shri Chandrasekarendra Saraswathi Sankaracharya Swamigal.

I had known Savithri Vaithi and visited Vishranthi. I was able to see the good arrangements made with the needs and necessities of life provided to the inmates being attended to with dedication and care. Savithri Vaithi had rendered yeoman services for the cause of the elderly people and leading a selfless life devoting herself to this noble cause.

I had known the incidents about Savithri Vaithi arranging for the performance of the funeral rites herself when the relatives of the dead woman members failed to come to the Home to take the body to their home. It was a highly remarkable service rendered by her.

It is a matter of surprise besides a great regret that Savithri Vaithi during her life time was not conferred one of Padma awards in recognition of her unique services rendered to society.

P.S. Subrahmanian
No. 87 (old number 50)
Dr. Radhakrishnan Salai
Mylapore, Chennai 600 004

Correction

Mr T.P. Vivekanand, son of T.D. Parthasarathy (MM Oct 16th and Nov. 1st) points out that his father was not the first journalist sent abroad by *The Hindu* to cover sports events but was the first to be sent to cover the Olympics. The error is regretted.

– The Editor

When Jesse Owens visited Madras

The reference to Jesse Owens in Deeptha Vivekanand's excellent article on T.D. Parthasarathy (*Madras Musings*, Nov. 1-15, 2020) took my mind back by some 65 years to the time when Jesse Owens was on a visit to India as a goodwill ambassador of the Government of United States. He toured many places in the country,

and visited Madras among other cities. Nowadays any VVIP visitor from overseas on a visit to India just touches New Delhi (and Agra in some cases) and vanishes. In those days that was not the practice. The visitor's itinerary would include a few other places besides, and be spread all over the country. It was the time when 'South India' meant only 'Madras' to the powers that be in Delhi. And so, if any city in the south was to be visited it would be Madras. Within the city, the visitor would be staying at the Raj Bhawan in Guindy and would be driven in an open car from there to wherever he or she would be going. It was the era before the arrival of the sharp-shooter and the suicide bomber on the scene; and with the VVIP visitor seated in it, the open car would be driven at a slow speed. The only concession made would be that all other traffic on the road would be stopped till the car passed. The VVIP would wave to the cheering crowds that would have collected on either side of the road. As a student at the College of Engineering Guindy, I had such darshan of many great leaders of that time such as Gamel Abdul Nasser, Khrushchev, Bulganin, Queen Elizabeth, Chou-en-lai and Marshall Tito among others. And of Jesse Owens I had more than just a darshan.



Jesse Owens. Courtesy: The Hindu.

Jesse Owens stayed for a couple of days, and visited and addressed meetings in some sports clubs and colleges here. At that time the people of Madras still had lingering memories of his historic performance at the Berlin Olympics in 1936 when he won a record four gold medals and blasted Hitler's theory of superiority of 'Aryan race' in the sports field. He was a hero everyone admired.

Jesse Owens addressed the students in two colleges. The first was at Stanley Medical College which meeting I attended as a guest of my brother Dr. Lakshmipathi who was then a student there. After the chief guest ascended the stage and took his seat, a girl student came on the stage to garland him. Jesse quickly walked to the mike and spoke to the audience.

"In India" he said, "You send beautiful girls to garland me. But you don't let me kiss them. I am not going to miss my chance today". With that he bowed down, planted a kiss on the cheek of the girl who shyly garlanded him. We the audience broke into thunderous applause.

The next day Jesse addressed the students in our College. This is how he began his address:

"I am happy to be addressing students at an engineering college. It is the medical professionals that I am afraid of addressing after what happened to me years ago in my home town."

He continued. "Once I was asked to speak at a function honouring a doctor who, I was told, had served our community for many years." I decided to be effusive in my praise. "I, personally, owe a lot to the doctor, I said." "He was the one who attended on my mother at her delivery and he was the one who brought me into this world."

"The person presiding over the function rushed to me.

"Cool it, Jesse" he hissed in my year, "He is a veterinary doctor."

G. Ram Mohan

A Place for Biden

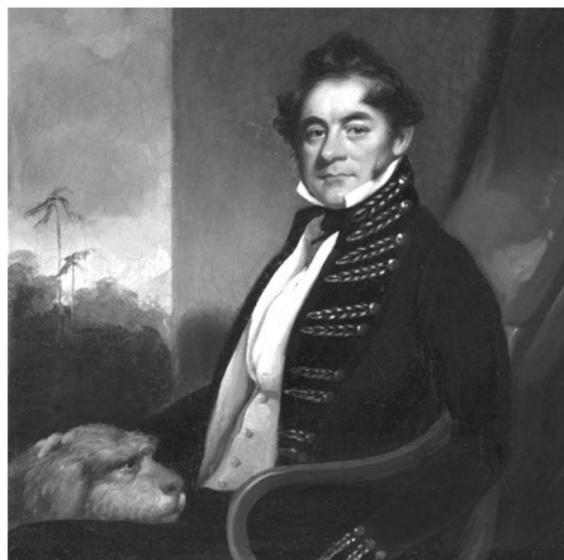
Ever since Joe Biden, now the US President elect, announced his intentions to run for that high office, interest in his ancestor with Indian connections has peaked. He had himself spoken of his great great great great grandfather George Biden, who after service with the East India Company, settled down in India, after marriage with a native woman. It is significant that no records of a George Biden have as yet surfaced. In August this year, an article by Tim Willasey-Wilsey, Visiting Professor of War Studies, King's College, London, was published in the website gatewayhouse.in (see Biden's Ancestral Chennai Connect – <https://www.gatewayhouse.in/joe-biden-chennai/>). It has since made the rounds on social media. This concerned Christopher Biden, who was Captain of several ships of the East India Company and then returned to England in the 1830s only to come back to Madras a few years later. Here he rose in position and society, eventually becoming Master Attendant of the Madras Harbour and was known for his charitable disposition. He died here in 1858 and a memorial plaque to him is in St. George's Cathedral. Willasey-Wilsey has speculated that this man may have been Joseph Biden's ancestor, though his name was not George. There are other loopholes – Joe Biden is a Catholic while Christopher Biden, though Irish was clearly Protestant, given his memorial at St George's.

Also, there are no records of Christopher having wedded an Indian woman. He, in 1819 had married Harriott, a Derbyshire girl and she accompanied him on his second and final voyage to Madras. The couple lost a daughter en-route. Mrs Biden lived long, dying in 1880, in the UK.

There however appears to have been another daughter.

And this is evident from the proceedings of the Committee of the Biden Testimonial Fund, which was formed immediately after his death, in 1858. This was headed by (afterwards Sir) Walter Elliot who is remembered today principally for having excavated the stupa at Amaravati and shipped much of it to the British Museum, leaving some of the remnants at the Government Museum, Madras. The artefacts are even now known as the Elliot Marbles, after the more famous Greek equivalents named after Elgin, even though the Amaravati stupa was of limestone. Be that as it may, Elliot and his Committee worked hard on the Biden fund and collected donations from Bombay, Calcutta and of course Madras, all testimony

out of this, after paying for the tablet and the funeral expenses, Rs 8,017-0-3 remained. It was deemed that this amount was too small for the construction of a Biden Home for Sailors and so the money was made over to the existing Sailors' Home at Royapuram with the proviso that the institution change its name to honour Biden. This the latter body was most happy to do and so it became the Biden Home for Sailors. It appears to have also been known as the Biden Home for Destitute Seamen. In 1939, the *Madras Tercentenary Volume* noted that the building was no longer being used for its original purpose. As per Gabriel Sathianathan, a long-standing friend and reader of *Madras Musings*, Biden Place as it came to be



Captain Christopher Biden seated, with his dog Hector. Courtesy: artnet.com.

LOST LANDMARKS OF CHENNAI

– SRIRAM V

to the popularity that Capt. Biden enjoyed. The money, it was resolved, would be used "for the construction of a building or the endowment of an institution called the Biden Home for Sailors, the erection of a monument over his grave and of a tablet in the cathedral, and the payment of his funeral expenses." The last appears to indicate that Biden, for all his sterling qualities, had not made sufficient money. This is further buttressed by the fact that the Advocate General, the Hon. Sydney Smythe petitioned the Honourable Court of Directors (the East India Company was still functioning) for an annuity for Mrs. Biden and her daughter, in view of "his long, zealous and loyal service". This the Company agreed to and the wife became entitled to a pension of 50 pounds per annum thereafter.

In the meanwhile, a sum of Rs 9,696-1-0 was collected and

known, was used as a guest house for captains of the merchant navy. He recalls it to have been a huge compound with pillars announcing the name *Biden Place* at the entrance. Karthik Bhatt, a regular contributor recalls visiting *Biden Place* in the early 1990s when it was residence for Port Trust officers. Located at the end of North Railway Terminal Road, Royapuram, *Biden Place* has made way for the large oil tanks by the harbour. Beside this is a park that is practically under the Royapuram flyover and in its centre is a square with an anchor moulded out of cement. This establishes the naval connect to what was once *Biden Place*.

Christopher Biden had many great qualities but one of the most heart-warming stories about him is the way he exposed trafficking in children, all along the Madras coast. This was in 1839, while he was serving as the Beach Magistrate, Madras. Early in November that year, the *Maydeen Bux*, a native brig flying British colours and under the command of a nakhuda (native captain), arrived at the Madras harbour. Its cargo was timber but when searched it was found to contain 32 children, aged between four and ten. The vessel was immediately impounded as per the instructions of Biden and the nakhuda and other crew arrested. Notwithstanding their protests that the children were all employed as cookhouse assistants, they were charged with kidnapping the boys and girls for sale as slaves.

While the story does not have a happy ending, there is no

doubt that Biden emerges as a hero. He immediately alerts the Government over the matter and then with the help of a translator, manages to get the names and details of the ancestral villages of each of the children. Even as this is progressing, another vessel, the *Srivatsa Lakshmi*, arrives with a similar group of children. This too is impounded and Biden takes charge of the human cargo. Among all the correspondence that is generated, one is particularly touching – it being the month of November, Biden petitions the Government for a supply of blankets so that the children can remain warm.

In the meanwhile, the Collectors and District Magistrates of all the towns that form present-day Andhra are alerted about these children, it being established that all of them are Telugu-speaking. Based on the details provided by the boys and girls, teams are sent by the respective district officers to the villages named and contacts established with the parents. It then transpires that this is a regular racket. A read of the official responses received is revealing – some are happy to deny the existence of any such practice in their area and with equal certainty are glad to name other districts where it happens, others just brush it off as something that happens all the time. This is common practice especially during times of famine writes an official. But there are some who are more sensitive and one of these is WU Arbuthnot, Magistrate of Vishakhapatnam. He sends out search parties with

single-minded focus and eventually, as many relatives as possible of the children are rounded up and sent to Madras as witnesses.

The testimonies of the children are gut-wrenching. Most have no idea if they were sold and where they were bound. Many had had their names changed. Interrogation of the seamen revealed that the children were to be sold as slaves in the Dutch East Indies. There was however a legal issue – not one of the parents or guardians were willing to come forward to prosecute and so, at Biden's insistence and with pressure from the Governor, Lord Elphinstone, the Government acted as prosecutor, with George Norton, Advocate General, leading. That there were vested interests is clear – there was a repeatedly expressed view that a ship ought not to be sequestered for so long, especially "at this time of the year." The trial ended in acquittal. The judge, Edward Gambier, let the accused off on a technicality for which Norton very nicely apologised. The government however censured him for his lapse.

Biden was left with the task of reuniting the children with their parents or near relatives. At the point at which the record stops, he still had 15 of them in his custody. We can only hope that they eventually led happy lives.

At his suggestion it became law all along Madras Presidency to have ships searched for unaccompanied children being kept captive and perhaps that did see some reduction in their being bought and sold.

If S. Muthiah was our founder, N. Sankar was our saviour. As Muthiah never tired of saying, had not Sankar stepped in at a crucial point in the life of Madras Musings and placed it on a sound financial footing with support from multiple corporate houses, the magazine would have been short lived. On the occasion of his 75th birthday, we wish our saviour and patron-in-chief many more years of good health and all happiness – The Editor

A true icon of Indian industry will turn 75 on November 19th. At the forefront of the Indian PVC manufacturing segment for over four decades, N. Sankar, the chairman of The Sanmar Group, presiding over a US \$ one billion diversified multinational group, has been a role model for entrepreneurs and institution builders alike, characterised by an unusual combination of business acumen and ethical conviction – upright, farsighted, innovative. A pioneer in PVC manufacture, he was responsible for some of the most original choices made in the field including the highly integrated manufacturing processes at the numerous facilities of Chemplast, its flagship company, now over fifty years old.

Though the son and grandson of trailblazers in the history of south Indian industry and commerce – respectively K.S. Narayanan and S.N.N. Sankaralinga Iyer – Sankar was not born with a silver spoon, certainly not in a career sense. He obtained his B.Sc. (Tech) in Chemical Engineering from the AC College of Technology, Madras, graduating with distinction, and a Masters degree from the Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago. He joined Chemplast in 1967 to help his father. In an interview years ago for *Rediff News* by Shobha Warriar, he recalled, "I was born in an entrepreneurial family of three generations, so automatically I also became an entrepreneur. I had no funds of my own to start an enterprise at that time. From 1967 to 1972, I worked with Chemplast, reporting to S. Ramaswamy, the chief executive of the company. I learnt a lot from him in those five years. He taught me simple things from how to draft a letter to how to manage people. Those were the most difficult times for Chemplast. But I learnt to cope with it."

In 1972, Sankar started his entrepreneurial career, borrowing from friends and investors to acquire a majority stake in a company called Industrial

Chemicals and Monomers. Determined to bring in technology to India to manufacture products of excellence as a measure of import substitution, he, all of 26 years old, was writing letters to foreign companies seeking collaboration with them, something very nearly unheard of then.

In search of mechanical seals it needed, Chemplast zoomed in on Durametallic of Michigan as its choice. Durametallic India at Karapakkam. Madras, resulted, growing into what is now Sanmar Engineering Technologies Private Limited, an engineering group within the Sanmar Group, catering to a wide range of process industries – even India's space missions – in need of components that principally ensure safety where the slightest risks must be ruled out. Several successful joint ventures have followed Durametallic India (now Flowserve Sanmar).

Sankar has over the decades ensured that these joint ventures with global corporations are models for emulation. He has clearly enunciated a joint venture philosophy which can be summarised somewhat on these lines: Both partners should appreciate the need for the joint venture. They should clearly agree on the way the JV will be managed, they must work towards a system based on trust and transparency. There must be appropriate interaction at different functional levels for the ongoing operations of the JV, and clearly defined high level contacts at both ends for management decision-making on important issues calling for the involvement of both partners. Finally, both partners need to be equally able to serve the growing capital needs of the JV as it expands.

Always leading the way with its concern for the environment, the chemicals division of Sanmar under Sankar has made a fine art of ZLD or zero liquid discharge at its manufacturing facilities, amidst a whole slew of steps taken to ensure sustainable growth.

Corporate governance is an article of faith with Sankar, who must count among his contribution to best practices in business and industry the manner in which Sanmar has evolved a clear-cut management philosophy, its HR policy based on competence and a performance culture, and an elaborately spelt out ethics manual that guides employees on how they can implicitly follow the group's code of conduct in a variety of circumstances that they may encounter.

Identifying the right person for the right job and empowering his employees to function competently and ethically without

fear seem to come naturally to Sankar.

"Strictly follow the law of the land, so that we can all sleep well at night" could well be defined as his paramount mantra to them.

Make no mistake, N. Sankar is a tough, demanding boss. Tasks must be completed in the proper timeframe, decisions should be based on irrefutable logic, information should be communicated clearly, honestly, and such communication has no hierarchy. It only takes him a couple of minutes to see through bluff and inadequate preparation for meetings. He is a master of follow-up, not for him dereliction in the guise of delegation. His attention to detail and meticulous planning do rub off on his managers who are empowered to discharge their responsibilities fearlessly, for so long as they do all that is required of them sincerely, failure will not be punished.

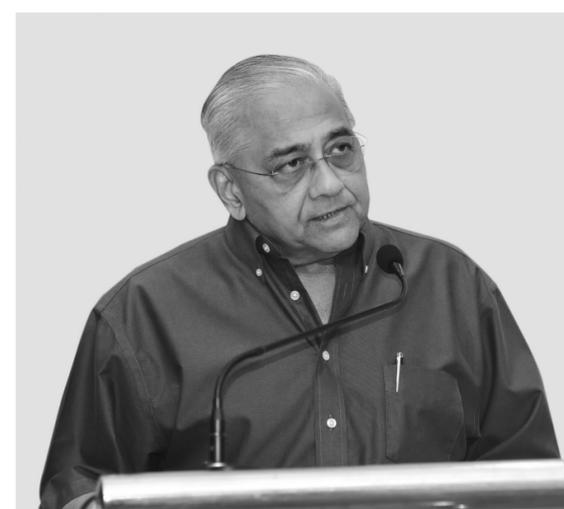
Sankar is known for his steadfast friendships and loyalties. Just as he treated S. Ramaswami,

● V. Ramnarayan

his first, and only, boss with due respect until his retirement, he developed strong bonds with his mentors and senior colleagues. If he found in any of them qualities that could serve the group well, he took advantage of their expertise and wisdom for as long as possible. His professor Dr. G.S. Laddha was one such person of eminence who served on the Chemplast board of directors for more than three decades. For all that his decisions seemed based on cold logic, they could be, and often were, tempered by the human touch – without prejudice to business sense. A sterling example was the way Sankar and his father Narayanan rallied round senior employee S.R. Seshadri, devastated by the loss of his wife while he was at Mettur working for Chemplast. They assisted his relocation to Madras and psychological rehabilitation by approving his pet project to manufacture mechanical seals, vital components required by Chemplast and the process industry in general. The end result was the joint venture Durametallic India. Firmly of the belief that public recognition and approbation are more important than monetary rewards, Sanmar not only honoured him properly during his tenure there but also posthumously by the establishment of the SR Seshadri

are S.B. Prabhakar Rao, M.N. Radhakrishnan and R. Kalidas. He also did not hesitate to reopen Sanmar's doors to employees who left the group when they sought reentry if he felt they could serve Sanmar well all over again.

The recipient of honours and awards of every description including lifetime achievement awards from state level and national level apex bodies for the chemical industry, Sankar has been a highly respected figure while helming such bodies as Assocham, the Madras Chamber of Commerce and the Madras Management Association, besides sports bodies like the Tamil Nadu as well as the All India Tennis Association, the Madras Cricket Club and Tamil Nadu Cricket Association.



Training Institute for its employees. Sankar also never hesitated to utilise the services of his most accomplished colleagues beyond their retirement age. Examples

ing the iconic team Jolly Rovers Cricket Club in 1966, when India Cements adopted the team and hired cricketers from far and wide inviting players from other states like Mysore and Andhra, with the company's director K.S. Narayanan enthusiastically leading the search party, as it were. Jolly Rovers dominated Madras cricket for many years, sweeping the league title repeatedly.

The golden jubilee of the Sanmar family-Jolly Rovers association was made memorable by an emotional gathering at Chennai of all living members of that first champion side in July 2015 and exactly a year later by the release by the great all rounder Kapil Dev of a book *Cricket for the Love of it* to commemorate this record association, accompanied by a presidential lecture by historian Ramachandra Guha.

The inaugural K.S. Narayanan Memorial Oration was delivered on January 30, 2016 by former England cricket captain David Gower. Every year since then, the Oration has maintained its high standards in both the quality of discourse as well as the unimpeachable credentials of the speakers. The crowning glory was the K.S. Narayanan Centenary Oration by former British Prime Minister David Cameron on January 30, 2019.

Sankar has never done anything by half measures and the way he has honoured his father's memory is second only to the devotion with which he cared for him in his lifetime.

With son Vijay Sankar ready to take over from him whenever he is ready to hang up his boots, Sankar can look back with satisfaction at his journey as entrepreneur, institution builder and enabler of human potential in diverse fields.



North Railway Terminus Park, where Biden Place once stood.

Quizzin' with Ram'nan

Quizmaster V.V. Ramanan's first 10 questions are on current affairs and next on 'man's best friend'.

1. How did a children's rhyme 'Baby Shark' by South Korean company Pinkfong make the news recently?
2. Sean Connery, the first screen James Bond who passed away recently, won an Oscar for his performance as Jimmy Malone, a veteran Irish-American police officer in which film?
3. Joe Biden was declared the winner of the US presidential election after the win in which state and its 20 electoral votes that put him at over 270 votes?
4. Which very popular messaging platform has become the latest to launch its own UPI payment feature in India?
5. Sangita Kalanidhi, Padma Bhushan T.N. Krishnan who passed away recently was a virtuoso in playing which instrument?
6. In which Indian State is being set up the world's largest care and cure centre for elephants?
7. Chennai-born Priyanka Radhakrishnan has become the first-ever Indian origin minister in which country headed by a woman PM?
8. Which South Atlantic island was declared landmine-free, 38 years after the end of a war between the UK and Argentina?
9. Which country had the unfortunate distinction of being the first nation in the world to surpass 10 million cumulative COVID-19 cases?
10. Which multiple-Grand Slam title winner recently became the fourth player to achieve 1,000 match wins on the ATP Tour?

11. The Chihuahua, the smallest dog breed, is named after a place in which country?
12. Which breed is called the 'barkless dog' because it is known for making a yodelling noise instead of barking?
13. What is the local name for the Indian native breed also called Maiden's Beastmaster?
14. Which lovable, playful canine's name literally means 'badger dog'?
15. All dogs trace their origins to which animal?
16. In the world of comics/cartoons, what breeds of dog were Snoopy and Scooby Doo?
17. Connect the Beatles song 'A Day in the Life' to our canine friends.
18. According to the Guinness Book of Records, which is the world's oldest known breed of domesticated dog?
19. What is the name of the brightest star in the night sky also called the 'Dog Star'?
20. What is the study of matters related to canines or domestic dogs called?

(Answers on page 8)

The future of mega cities

Sanjay may be in the early-40s now. I have known him for over 10 years. He came to Chennai with his father, Ram Pujan Chaudhary, from a village in Buxar District of Bihar. Ram Pujan is a class one mason. He has led a group of masons and unskilled workers and has worked on many projects, like the new secretariat on Anna Salai, new hostels on IIT M campus, etc. I ran into Ram Pujan accidentally one rainy afternoon at a teashop near the Taramani gate of IIT Madras. Taking shelter there, we discovered that we were both from Bihar, earning a living at IITM. Gradually, we came to know and help each other in many small ways. A few years ago, Ram Pujan left to pass his final days at his village, giving the charge of his group to his elder son, Sanjay, who led it very ably. Ajay, his younger son, also trained by Rampujan in Chennai, moved away with another group to Dubai.

Sanjay got new contracts, worked in new projects, and, owing to regional rivalries at construction sites, got into new fights, lost some, won others, but kept his flock together. Sanjay also helped when I needed it. He sent workers, and accepted whatever I gave him. In the last week of April, Sanjay called me to say that he and his group had been in distress and would I please do anything to help them have some meals, some water, and to return to their village. It was truly distressing.

Sanjay and his group were somewhere on the Rajiv Gandhi Salai, near Sholinganallur, stranded and jobless since the imposition of complete lockdown. They had run out of provisions and savings and were starving. I called a senior police officer I knew. The officer was kind. He asked me to give him their location etc. and also to find someone who could coordinate on their behalf. The officer was looking for someone who spoke English and Tamil. Luckily, I knew another Bihari, a friend who had been raised in Chennai. He speaks Tamil and English fluently, besides being good in Hindi, Maithili and some other Bihari languages. He agreed to help. By sunset the same day, the local police gave them some rice, *dhall* and water. They were a group of about 50 people. In about a week, they boarded the train to Patna and reached their respective villages, grateful to police and friends in Chennai. I do not know if and when they will come back to Chennai.

Since the mid-eighties or even earlier, Bihari labour started coming to Chennai; until then, they went to Calcutta, and, after Calcutta became a "dead

city", as Rajiv Gandhi said, they moved west to Delhi, Punjab, Rajasthan, Bombay, Pune, etc., finally turning South. I have found Bihari labour all over from Vizag to Tiruvandrum, selling *paan*, working in restaurants, working as security guards, lift operators, taxi and autodrivers, and doing many other odd jobs. A senior revenue intelligence officer of the Government of India once told me that if all Bihari labour went home, then tea shops, *paan* shops, construction work, private security services, etc. all over India could be badly affected.

I came to Chennai in 1988 and I found that there was a Bihar Association, with its own premises and address in Gopalapuram, where people from Bihar, working in different parts of Chennai and suburbs, gathered and celebrated Bihari festivals. Satyanarayan *puja* every full moon evening drew all members of this association, and the guests staying on its premises, together every month; they were just about enough to comfortably fill the hall on the ground floor. Until about

● by
Shreesh Chaudhary

2005, it was not difficult to find a seat in its hall. Most people here were in government jobs or in some small businesses, and knew one another. Bihar Association building, Rajendra Bhawan, is on the Cathedral Road, almost next to the American Consulate, opposite Stella Maris College. The Association got this piece of prime property in Chennai due to the benevolence of the Late Shri Ramnath Goenka, owner of *The Indian Express*, whose mother perhaps came from Darbhanga in Bihar. So, when approached by his friends from Bihar, he gave them some land and money. And Bihar Association got a permanent address in Chennai.

By about 2015, the situation became bad. So many people came from Bihar to Chennai to do and to look for jobs that it was impossible to get them all into one hall. Most were in IT companies, recruited from a thousand tech institutes all over the South. Then there were the construction industry, marketing agencies and support services like catering, transport, security, health care, education of children, etc. hiring skilled or otherwise but cheap labour from a region that had unending supply of them. So many people from Bihar now were studying and working in Chennai. You frequently heard Maithili, Bhojpuri, Magahi – the principal languages of Bihar, in

public places in Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad and other big and not so big cities in the South. Villages in Bihar, and entire North Bihar from Purnia to Champaran is one big village, had hardly anyone between 16 and 60 left there. Like they used to say about women in the army, "some were above 50 the others below nine".

Boys and girls, they all had converged in Chennai, Hyderabad, Bangalore, etc. swelling their population, drawing on their precious natural resources and surviving. Even places like Taramani, a slum surrounded by rich neighbours, became crowded with these young people living in dozens in one or two-room-plus-toilet accommodation which had hardly enough water or space or rain shelter for so many people. But because they worked in shifts, they managed.

Within a decade, the city stretched in all possible directions in all possible ways. When Metro Water had hardly enough for its registered customers, it had millions in the queue waiting to be served. All essential commodities – housing, air, water, local transport, health-care services, catering, parks and entertainments, school seats, milk, fruits, vegetables, meat and fish, street sanitation services – were breathless. All have been in short supply and high demand, raising prices and lengthening queues, and placing goods and services beyond the reach of at least about 25 per cent of the local population. For one thing, Elliott's Beach was no longer a place for a family on Sunday evenings.

Can Chennai afford to have so many migrant workers? Has this kind of unrestricted industrialisation ever helped? Has an insatiable appetite for money and more money ever in any culture and civilisation led to a healthy and sustainable growth? I would much rather be in Bangalore, that after giving birth to four nationalised banks decided to move their bigger operations out of South Kanara and to save its rain washed laterite rocks amidst the green slopes of the Western Ghats, than in Bangalore which mortgaged not only its idyllic parks and gardens, but also its soul. Its crime graph is rising fastest in South India. Did anyone, local or folks like us, who fell in love with it at first sight, bargain for a Bangalore of this kind, where you are unsafe at night, and unsafe during day!

It is late already, but not too late yet for Chennai. It can learn from others that have trodden this path of unchecked industrialisation before it. Look at Calcutta, the flourishing city,

the best Asia had until about 1947, early 1950s – it had industry, art, culture, education, publishing, navigation, parks, museums, cinema, theatre, everything. Calcutta was the place, but because of its appetite for more and more, it finished itself. It became the headquarters of two railway zones, Eastern and South Eastern Railways, of oil companies, of Coal India, of the Tea Board, of Steel Authority, of banks, etc., when these offices should have been there in Bihar, Jharkhand, Assam, Orissa, Eastern UP, etc. which is where their main operation happened. Let alone towns and cities in neighbouring states, Calcutta did not allow other cities even within Bengal to grow. Chennai at least has let Coimbatore, Madurai and Trichy come up.

I am witness to the dichotomy in the attitude of the locals towards the migrant labour. You want them to clean your used vessels and bedsheets, but you do not want them sitting next to you in the park or on the train. Your children will not work in or learn your mother tongue, but you insist upon these people learning to speak yours. Time and again Chennai police has done a commendable job in this area. It has always stood up against Tamil chauvinism. But then it adds to the work of the police. You had one constable per 1,000 people, now you have one per 10,000, at least in Chennai. The only metro city in the Indian subcontinent to have escaped terrorist attack has not yet been able to locate how and where a wagonload of demonetised currency notes coming from Trichy to Chennai disappeared. You may not recognize it, but you do pay a price.

If Chennai and other cities in the South still want to survive, they have only one way; they can take their businesses out also to those places where their labour came from. There is no reason why all not so big companies of India and from outside should not create at least one office in North Bihar. They can have all the natural resources there, most important of which, in my opinion, is abundance of relatively cheap and skilled workers, followed by, so far, air and water as God made them. Some imaginary problem is there in terms of law and order, of floods and droughts, of frequent holidays, and inadequate infrastructure, etc., they are all managerial problems, and can be handled accordingly. Regional boundaries, as the current pandemic has shown so clearly and painfully, are a burden from the past, unprotectable by passwords and firewalls. We must share with all, and like all.

The Magnificent Trio

V.K.Parthasarathy, former State player and former Vice-President of the Tamil Nadu Tennis Association writes on the Big 3, two of whom have graced Chennai with their presence.

To be at the top of a tough international sport like tennis and remain there for a length of time is certainly no mean achievement. Three of the most celebrated players in the world: Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic, all in their thirties, have been in the forefront of world tennis from 2003 onwards. During this period, they have collectively won 57 Grand Slam titles (Federer 20, Nadal 20 and Djokovic 17) and incidentally prize-money of more than 100 million dollars each. To this can be added Olympic medals, ATP tournaments and Davis Cup ties. It is notable that all three have surpassed Pete Sampras's earlier record of 14 grand slams.

There is little in common among these three stalwarts as they come from different parts of Europe, each with a

distinct personality and style of play. These ambitious and fierce competitors are admittedly arch rivals but at the same time, all three are known for their sportsmanship and court manners. Over a period of time, their rivalry softened into mutual admiration and finally into friendship off the court. The story of men's international tennis for the last fifteen years is nothing but a record of achievements of this Magnificent Trio. They have raised the standard of tennis to breath-taking heights that other aspiring players have found

● by
V.K. Parthasarathy

difficult to reach. Even equally gifted players like Del Potro of Argentina and Andy Murray of Great Britain have not been able to stay in the reckoning partly owing to injuries. The trio's domination of the game is such that in most major tournaments, two of the three met



Federer, Nadal and Djokovic – the powers to reckon with in today's Tennis. Picture Courtesy: The Hindu.

in the final rounds as shown in the following statistics:

Head to Head: Nadal leads Federer 24-16; Djokovic leads Federer 27-23; Djokovic leads Nadal 29-36.

No. of weeks at No.1 ATP: Federer 3120, Djokovic 305, Nadal 209.

Roger Federer – Mr. Perfection

Roger Federer whose is a brilliant all-round game, is accepted as the most accomplished player in the world since Rod Laver. He is very positive and determined. Lurking behind his smile and affability is

a ruthless killer instinct. He derives his power not from muscles but from coordination and timing. His composure, exemplary court etiquette and graciousness towards the beaten opponent have made him

(Continued on page 8)

Zoom ... To-Do's and Not-to-Do's

'Lockdown relaxations.'

These words, fizzing like soda run amok, appear to have gone straight to several heads, encouraging rash decisions. The authorities, on the other hand, warn of restrictions still in place, so group gatherings remain an iffy proposition.

This means the days of zoom meetings, of webinars, are not exactly over.

Which brings us to certain potentially sensitive issues.

Look, we understand – this is a from-your-home situation. The distance between you and any gathering is measured by the number of steps you take to get to the device of your choice.

But... close attention required here...this is an audio-visual medium.

That's right. You are both seen and heard, sometimes more of you than necessary.

Surely the nature of each zoom call must influence sartorial, and other, decisions?

Friends and family – no one else's business.

But lectures and talk shows?

No one expects haute couture or formals – but inner-wear 'banians'?

Bit much, no?

The same goes for those ubiquitous 'nnnn...'. Okay, here on MM, we tread carefully around the word 'nighties'. Several years ago, readers may recall, a lively debate broke out in these pages between certain people, who, to give them all credit, have always maintained the purity of the word, the polished and perfect mot juste. Naturally, such dedication sometimes leads to

● by **Ranjitha Ashok**

impassioned debate. Things got a bit heated before a truce was struck, but apparently those on the receiving end still tend to come leaping out of bed in the dead of the night, having dreamt of being chased by angry kaftans on rampage.

Well, whatever the right term – go easy on the leisure wear.

And, unless you are ill, lolling in bed isn't really a great look, even more so during serious talks on morose subjects like the economic impact of the year 2020.

Another point – do take a quick look around before you click on 'join with video'. On one unfortunate occasion, the lady of the house merrily joined-with-video-ed, while her better half was still putting his shirt on. The poor gentleman promptly panicked when he found himself on candid camera, lost sight of the arm holes, then swiftly proceeded to spin in circles in a desperate dance

trying to find them, dragged his shirt on finally, then buttoned it all wrong, while his wife continued smiling sweetly at the camera, oblivious to both the tragic drama behind her, and the fifty-sixty odd witnesses watching in bemused wonder. The tech-in-charge, having momentarily frozen in shock for a few seconds, then came to and quickly blocked them out.

Painful.

Very important – learn to mute/unmute.

Picture this. A 'box' suddenly comes alive. It's blank but you can hear the voices.

Rumbling Rasp: "I can't see anyone."

Gritted-Teeth Impatience: "Try clicking on that button."

Rumbling Rasp: "What button? Where?"

Gritted-Teeth Impatience: "This is precisely why I asked you to find out what to do before the meeting starts. But do you ever listen?"

Rumbling Rasp: "Every day you are becoming more and more like your mother."

Gritted-Teeth Impatience: "What did you..." and the moderator finally mutes everyone, a sigh of relief goes up, while some secretly wish they could have heard a bit more about this much-maligned mother.

If you spot a friend in the gallery of faces now opening up before you, do remember a measured 'hello' is preferable to the more common exuberant 'View Halloo' that makes everyone else in the group dive for cover, and gives you some idea how a fox must have felt. This also applies to those who insist on greeting the Speaker just to register their presence, especially when they are planning to exit quietly once the meeting begins.

If you have decided that the outside is better because a foliage backdrop suits your skin tone, then do request the birds in your garden to please stay quiet for a while. Otherwise, handle the mute button more efficiently.

Back to the interior, do inform your fellow inmates that a call will be in progress at this time, so please avoid wandering cluelessly into the frame, draped in a towel after a shower (Yes, this has happened), and don't allow either pressure cookers or mixies to start expressing themselves without a warning.

The Speaker and the tech-in-charge have enough unpredictable to worry about without these additions.

It's simple.

Just re-interpret the three-monkey message.

People can see you, people can hear you, so think before you speak.

The mute button - very useful, ladies and gentlemen.

Amazing how this little feature can bring such peace and order into the world.

Feels like there's a lesson in there somewhere, doesn't it?

THE MAGNIFICENT TRIO

(Continued from page 7)

the most popular among tennis players and spectators alike. He holds a record of 20 Grand Slam titles including a record 8 Wimbledon titles. No other tennis player in the open era has been a contender for Gram Slam titles at his age (late thirties).

Federer is much more than a tennis player. He has shown concern for the needy through the various schemes of the Federer Foundation. In 2011, in the Reputation Institute's study on the world's most respected, admired and trusted personalities, Federer ranked number 2 behind Nelson Mandela. After the 2004 tsunami that severely affected South India, Federer arranged an exhibition match with the top players at the time in Indian Wells, USA, called 'Rally for Relief'. The proceeds went to the victims of the tsunami. He even visited Chennai and other affected areas in Tamil Nadu towards the end of 2006. It was an unpublicised humanitarian visit under the aegis of the UN. All his accomplishments on and off the tennis court earned him the honour of being named Goodwill Ambassador by UNICEF in 2006.

Rafael Nadal – Chennai's favourite

Rafael Nadal of Spain is the most colourful player of the trio. He first came to Chennai for the 2004 Chennai Open ATP tournament. The teenager's unconventional attire of colourful calf-length tight-fitting shorts and matching T-shirt,

head-band over long hair and his mannerisms made conservative Chennaiites look askance. But when he started hitting the ball, they had no doubts he had the makings of a champion. Although he lost the singles in the first round, he won the men's doubles title partnering his compatriot Tommy Robredo. Indeed, he won the French Open the following year. He came back to Chennai in 2007, when he beat the then top player Carlos Moya in a nail-biting semi-final match, the 2nd longest in ATP history, and became the City's favourite forever. He too had a special place in his heart for Chennai, and he expressed his sympathy during the traumatic 2015 floods. "I heard about the floods in Chennai. It's really saddening to see so many people suffering; it's worse when it happens in a place that you've visited. I've been there a couple of times for the Chennai Open. It was a great feeling playing there with some amazing crowd support."

His overall performance is almost as impressive as Federer's with 20 Grand Slam titles of which 13 were from the French Open. Nadal has won 85 career titles overall, including the most outdoor titles in the open era (84) and a record 60 titles on clay. With 81 consecutive wins on clay, Nadal holds the record for the longest single-surface win streak in the open era. He has also won Olympic Gold Medals, Davis Cup ties, not to mention other ATP tournaments. His powerful top spin forehand is consid-

ered the most lethal stroke in tennis today. Over time he has become the crowd's favourite wherever he plays.

Novak Djokovic – The Ballkids' Buddy

Currently World No.1, the youngest of the trio Novak Djokovic started playing tennis at the age of 4, and winning tennis championships at the age of 14. He won his first Grand Slam in Australia in 2008 at the age of 21. He then surged forward and has very nearly caught up with the other two through several victories, with a record of 8 Australian Open titles, including the latest one in January 2020. He is the first player in the 28-year history of ATP World Tour Masters 1000s to win all nine elite tournaments and complete the Career Golden Masters.

His game is characterised by speed, power and precision, and fortified by a single-minded determination to win. He always keeps cool under pressure and succeeds in overturning the match in his favour. He has declared his intention of overtaking Nadal and Federer. Going by his present form, age and mind-set, he may well succeed.

Early in his career, he used to entertain spectators by imitating various players including Maria Sharapova. His clowning ended when he became a champion, but he continues to entertain the crowd by taking a characteristic sweeping bow along with the ballkids in all four directions when he wins. He is always their Champion.



Chennai Open 2004 Men's Doubles winners: Rafael Nadal and Tommy Robredo.

Very recently, the trio has been appointed to the ATP Payers Council Committee, with Djokovic as President. It was Djokovic who, earlier this year, came forward to help aspiring players who suffered financial losses following the cancellation of tournaments because of the pandemic. The top 3 tennis players in the world have graciously come forward in support

of any scheme of assistance to young players. They also subscribed to the idea of changes in the distribution of prize money making it more equitable to benefit middle-level players. Such a trio of champions has never been seen before in the history of tennis.

(Article updated after the recent French Open Championships.)

Answers to Quiz

1. It became the most played video on YouTube, having been viewed 7.1 billion times, 2. *The Untouchables*, 3. Pennsylvania, 4. WhatsApp, 5. Violin, 6. Kerala, 7. New Zealand, 8. Falklands Islands, 9. USA, 10. Rafael Nadal.

* * *

11. Mexico, 12. Basenji, 13. Kanni, 14. Dachshund, 15. Wolves (more specifically grey wolf), 16. Beagle and Great Dane, 17. Paul McCartney has said that he added a frequency only dogs can hear to the end of the song, 18. Saluki, 19. Sirius, 20. Cynology.

Madras Musings is supported as a public service by the following organisations



Amalgamations Group



ASHOK LEYLAND

Bata

Aapki Jeet. Hamari Jeet. Bata India Limited



Brakes India Private Limited

cenza



CHATRATH TRUST

FLSMIDTH

F.L. Smidth Limited

THE HINDU

The Hindu Group of Publications



K SUGAR AND IND COR



MRF

murugappa

NIPPO

Rane

Rane Group

RAYALA GROUP

SAINT-GOBAIN

The future of glass. Since 1665.

SANMAR

SF

SUNDARAM FINANCE
Enduring values. New age thinking.



Sundram Fasteners Limited



Hotels Resorts and Palaces

TAKE
Enabling Business Efficiencies



TATA CONSULTANCY SERVICES

TVS

TVS MOTOR COMPANY

Since 1856,
patently leaders
— A WELLWISHER