

DAY'S DIARY

Michelangelo's art

Michelangelo's statue of David is believed to have been installed on this day in 1504 in the cathedral of Florence

COMMISSION

It was commissioned in 1501 and was moved to a public square, outside the Palazzo Vecchio, the seat of civic government in Florence, in the Piazza della Signoria



ABOUT THE STATUE

Carved from a single block of white Italian Carrara marble that had been rejected by other artists for being flawed, the statue depicts a nude David



RECENT HISTORY

On November 12, 2010, a fiberglass replica of the David was installed on the rooftop of Florence Cathedral, for one day only

Interview with Deepak Kingrani

PG 4

File pictures of 2015 floods | EXPRESS



Conservation architect Benny Kuriakose talks about the urgent need to connect waterbodies to the sea and elevate floodplains in the city

Solutions IN A SEA OF problems

JACOB B JACOB

BENNY Kuriakose tucked his lungi to the waist and darted out of his apartment in Kotturpuram into the road to fix the concrete slab on the pavement that collapsed in the annual fury of the northeastern monsoon. It was November 2022 and dawn was yet to break over the city. Almost an hour was spent by the conservation architect and the apartment caretaker in the perennial downpour to place bricks over the broken slab spilling out sewage-laden water. Strong winds whipped against the windows in the dotted twinkle of the streetlights; the water on the slope rose to over a foot. The rainwater was trickling into the Adyar River beyond the apartment building.

"If an overnight spell of rain is enough to inundate the streets, what would happen once the sea level rises?" muses the advocate of vernacular architecture. Against this backdrop, climate scientists predict the sea level will gradually rise by a metre or even two by 2100. "It's time to act. Several low-lying areas could be spotted across Chennai and other cities. Climate change is only making flooding worse. If we do not act now, the landmass will soon be below the flood level. Low-lying areas and floodplains must be elevated," says Benny.

In cities across India, waterbodies are almost full to the brim. The Greater Chennai Corporation's (GCC) stormwater drain (SWD) project was envisioned to channel the rainwater as it gets emptied into nearby waterbodies and reduce inundation. But what happens when all the waterbodies get chock-full? In an attempt to avoid any future calamitous events, Benny expounds a meticulous approach that would connect waterbodies to the sea to facilitate a mellow outflow.

Making room

There has been a significant reduction in the area of the waterbodies and the terra firma. The Pallikarai

marsh, for instance, has shrunk to almost one-tenth of its size over the decades. Landfills and industries have cropped up on the marsh over time, adding fuel to the inundation worries. Even the catchment areas of the marsh in Velachery and Madipakkam have been eaten up by new constructions.

As a result, the rainwater, which earlier found ample room to flow out, tends to inundate the land, making it harder for itself to empty into waterbodies. Constructions on areas vulnerable to flooding should be avoided at all costs, says Benny.

Between 2006 and 2015, the Dutch redesigned their cities, historically prone to flooding, by implementing the sustainable planning concept of The Room for The River. Enough room was created for rivers to flow, and the spatial aspects of the waterbodies in the project were improved. He highlights that such an initiative to create areas and increase



river conveyance to facilitate water flow without restraint is absent in our cities. 'Zones' could as well be created, which, in the dry seasons, could be used as playgrounds or parks.

"We need to be in a position where we will be able to predict the intensity of the rain. The low-lying areas must be mapped out beforehand. For instance, 10 cm of overnight rain lashes parts of the city. We should be able to predict how much rainfall Adyar or Velachery would receive, and act accordingly," says Benny. Such a system, he collects, is utilised in several European countries. It becomes handy while identifying beforehand the low-lying areas along the banks of rivers. The only way to unclog such areas is to pump out the rainwater in excess. "Unlike olden times, floods have become an annual event and the sudden fluctuations in climate are fuelling irreparable consequences. Do not even think of piecemeal solutions to tackle the crisis at

hand. Connect waterbodies to the sea, elevate floodplains, and create areas and enough room for water to flow," he reckons.

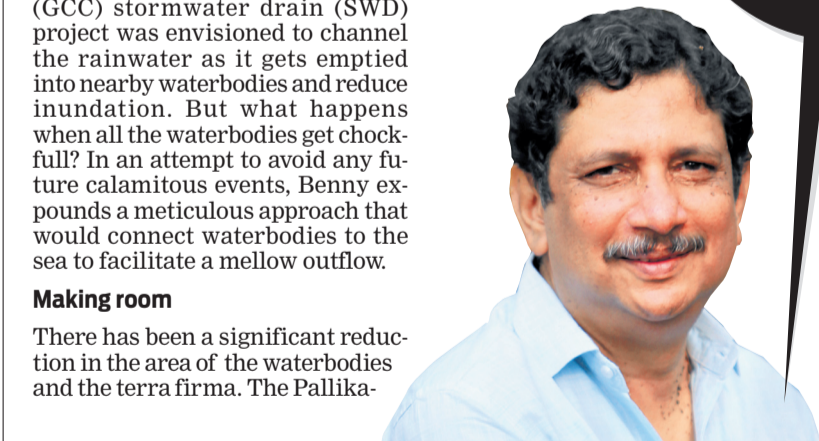
Indigenous ingenuity

Throughout his career, Benny has been advocating indigenous architecture to tackle the climate crisis. Western architecture abounded in wide-scale use of glass and facades let in heat impetuously. Adopting such international designs exacerbates climate breakdown. Instead, thermal comfort or passive indigenous methods such as cross ventilation to keep the room cool should be promoted in India.

"It is not time yet to assess the stormwater drains in Chennai. We need to wait and see if the network of drains withstands the monsoon spell. As a preparatory measure, the authorities should complete the project in time to avoid a flood-like situation this monsoon," says G Sundarajan of city-based NGO Poovulagin Nanbargal. Climate change has become the new normal, says the environmentalist, underlining the need to adapt and tackle its adverse effects. "It is quite likely that the waterbodies will be full to the brim as time goes by. The fight to reclaim our landscapes from climate atrocities should begin at household levels. Rainwater harvesting is still being overlooked. Ponds and lakes need to be created; the former could be maintained at household levels," he adds.

J Radhakrishnan, who recently took charge as the commissioner of the GCC, told *TNIE* that the possible inundation events will be addressed comprehensively for a permanent solution. "Unfinished works are being expedited to tackle any possible events of inundation. We are also identifying areas that are prone to waterlogging," says the GCC commissioner.

Before signing off, Benny recalls the post-disaster rehabilitation project he carried out in the tsunami-ravaged villages of Tharangambadi in 2004. Fisherfolk families residing along the coast were relocated, and damaged buildings were reconstructed. Most importantly, the ground level was raised by about 2.5 metres above the sea level, recalls Benny. Elevation, restates the architect, is the buzzword in bypassing flood-like situations. Since planet B is yet to be discovered, it is always better to be on the safer side.



Do not even think of piecemeal solutions to tackle the crisis at hand. Connect waterbodies to the sea, elevate floodplains, and create areas and enough room for water to flow.

Benny Kuriakose

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SCUBA DIVER'S SIXER UNDER THE SEA

FOLLOWING the momentous win of Chennai Super Kings on May 29, the entire city erupted in cheers for their favourite team. Banners were put up, and fireworks lit the sky as the Chennai *makkal* celebrated their home team. But among the din of the celebration, one fan stood out in his actions.

Diving below 60 feet in Neelankarai, on May 30, Aravind Tharunsri, a scuba diving instructor and fitness enthusiast, along with his team, went underwater and played cricket to commemorate CSK's victory. Aravind runs a scuba diving centre in Puducherry and trains a few governmental organisations and individuals in diving. "Our main objective is to help with marine conservation and clean up plastic pollution. Besides shore clean-ups, we also focus on underwater cleaning to help with conservation against plastic pollution," he says.

A scuba diving instructor for the past 18 years, Aravind's centre accepts all children above the age of ten to learn scuba diving. The centre has a branch in Neelankarai. "It is unfortunately seasonal (in Chennai). From the months of January to April, we keep our cen-



Aravind Tharunsri and his team dove underwater and played cricket on May 30

tre open in Neelankarai because the water is usually blue. After those months, it becomes green and hard to see anything underwater. Thankfully, the water wasn't too bad while videotaping our match celebration. So that's a relief!" he says.

From holding India's first underwater marriage and engagement, to the world's first underwater book release, Aravind has carved a niche for himself. The reason was to garner the public's attention. "I want to bring awareness to the people around me about the importance of conserving the ocean. And holding events underwater, and gaining attention can help spread the message about ocean conservation," he shares.

An ardent fan of CSK, Aravind wishes to use the opportunity of celebration to further his efforts. "When I do something underwater, I wish for it to translate into the message of saving the ocean. Don't throw your plastics on the beach or into the sea and rivers, keep your surroundings clean," he says. He along with his daughter Thaaragai Aarathana, make conservation efforts to save the ocean, and have been recognised nationally for their services to the environment.

BEYOND THE COLOURS & CRITICISMS

DIYA MARIA GEORGE

QUOTING a line from Francis Kiruba Kavithaigal, "*Naan thaan en melai daivadakashnam, karunaiye pakalmai kelvi kettitileyirukk, neeyuma?*" (I ask questions to myself without any empathy, you also?), LGBTQIA+ activist and independent filmmaker Malini Jeevarathnam came out about their gender identity in front of the audience at ICSA for the first time on Sunday. "If someone asks me what my gender identity is, honestly I don't know what to say. I am still questioning. Even before society asks us who we are and what kind of body we have, we have to accept ourselves no matter how we are," says Malini. The event 'Exploring Queer Identities and Lives Beyond LGBT,' organised by the LGBTQIA+ organisations Orinam, SAATHI, Thozhi and Sahodaran became a community discussion about the lesser known gender identities and lives, including pansexual, panromantic, ace, intersex, non-binary and gender-fluid.

Shattering the box

When we are restricted and asked to fit inside boxes built by society, understanding what you need is almost impossible. Through their performance, a coffee table conversation, queer activists SwethaSri and Alex emphasised the need to understand oneself. Alex says, "I am a non-binary person who is attracted to boys. In 1995, when the movie *Rangeela* released everyone adored Urmila Matondkar. I couldn't take my eyes off Jackie Shroff. But I didn't tell anybody then," affirming that through the nuances of your life you might understand who you are but society keeps telling you to think in a different way. Concurring that the movies we watch affect the opinion of the majority, SwethaSri says, "In most of the Indian movies romance is connected to sex. *Kamatheyum thaandi oru kaadhah irukku* (There is love beyond lust). We need to understand that. I am a panromantic asexual trans woman and there are a lot of gender identities and sexual identities. India will truly be a *vallarasu* (superpower)

if we can openly say whom we love." Alex adds, "Just because you can't see a certain form of love doesn't mean that it is non-existent."

SwethaSri and Alex explain that sometimes even people from the community aren't aware of certain LG-BTQIA+ vocabulary. "There is a need for spreading awareness on the LG-BTQIA+ glossary. Through discussions and community events, that is what we are trying to do. Lot of people have limited knowledge. For example, 'Trangender' is an umbrella term. Anyone who identifies as a different gender other than the birth gender, then they are referred to as 'trans'," says SwethaSri, adding that people don't have to look a certain way or behave a certain way to be who they truly are. "I can only be in my own way. My dress and my behaviour have always been a battle for me. Criticism is what is always there. We don't usually talk about the real issues. Topics like sex and abuse are not spoken enough," shares Alex.

The struggle for survival gets even more difficult considering the discrimination the people in the community face from all sectors of the society. For example, colloquially in Tamil Nadu and Kerala, trans persons are derogatorily called 'onbathu'. "There have been hard times when my classmates used to say the word *onbathu*, I will turn back and see if someone was calling me. Teachers would also address me the same. There wasn't a choice sometimes," shares Madan, a queer artist. "Over the years, *onbathu* became a pride, not an insult. But sometimes I used to wonder if I am fitting into their definition of an *onbathu*. *Onbathu aanalum athil entha niramulla onbathu?*" I have searched if there is something beyond the colours. When my partner asked me what is the label or name that we should give to our relationship, I told my partner to call it Malini or anything as it is the love between both of us," concludes Malini emphasising that labels aren't necessary.

To understand LGBTQIA+ terminology, visit orinam.net/lgbt-glossary developed by community members and media.



(L-R) SwethaSri, Malini Jeevarathnam and Alex in conversation | ASHWIN PRASATH

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2nd to 11th
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Timings :
10:30 AM to 8:30 PM

The Cartoon Show
Date: 9th June 2023
Timings: 5:30 PM to 6:30 PM

The Shadow Show Live
Date: 10th June 2023
Timings: 5:30 PM to 6:30 PM

The Magic Show Live
Date: 11th June 2023
Timings: 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM

Venue : CERC Exhibition Ground, Opp Kalakshetra & Pamban Swamy Koil, Thiruvanniyur, Chennai - 600 041
Art & Crafts | Clothing | Jewellers | Fashion Accessories | Home Decor & More
For Details Contact: 6364685716/9036658774 Entry and Parking Free!