



Reconstruction of the age old bridge is welcome; But Chatham-Bambooflat link remains a “pipe dream”

Port Blair: The prolonged restoration of the historic Chatham Bridge has once again brought the spotlight on a larger and unresolved infrastructure question confronting the Andaman and Nicobar Islands—the absence of a permanent bridge connecting Chatham and Bambooflat, a long-promised project that thousands of daily commuters believe could have transformed connectivity across South Andaman.

Even as the Andaman Public Works Department (APWD) has now assured that the ongoing restoration of the Chatham Bridge will be completed by the end of this year, frustration continues to mount over what many describe as the government’s silence on the proposed Chatham-Bambooflat bridge, a project that had once found mention at the highest political level but has since disappeared from public discourse.

A high-level joint inspection of the restoration work of the Chatham Bridge was recently carried out by the South Andaman Zilla Parishad Adhyaksh, the Chief Engineer of APWD and the Superintending Engineer to assess the progress of repairs on the ageing bridge, which serves as a crucial transport link between Sri Vijaya Puram and the South Andaman region. The inspection comes



against the backdrop of severe hardship faced by thousands of commuters from Bambooflat, Wimberlygunj, Ferrargunj, Mithakhari and adjoining villages since restrictions were imposed on the bridge.

The disruption has forced residents to endure long walks to ferry points, while elderly persons, pregnant women, schoolchildren and daily wage earners have borne the brunt of the inconvenience. Vehicles are unable to access the jetty directly, significantly increasing travel time and affecting commercial activities.

Local representatives acknowledged that connectivity has effectively regressed by several decades, with many residents comparing the present situation to the transport difficulties experienced 30 to

40 years ago.

Officials explained that the restoration itself is an engineering challenge. Foundation repairs can only be undertaken during low tide, leaving workers with a narrow three to five-hour window each day for underwater operations. During high tide, teams shift to strengthening the

superstructure and removing deteriorated concrete to reduce structural load.

The project is also dependent on specialised construction materials and repair chemicals sourced from overseas suppliers. According to officials, procurement has already been completed and the consignments are on their

way.

Despite repeated revisions to the completion schedule, the Zilla Parishad Adhyaksh said the latest review had provided confidence that the bridge would be reopened by the end of December. Senior PWD engineers reportedly assured

Continued on page 03



TSG GROUP
(SINCE 1945)
A NAME YOU CAN TRUST

Invest in Plots
Invest in your Future
Village: Mithakhari | Survey No.: 420

- 6 METER ROAD FORMATION
- 1.5 KM FROM MARKET
- 4KM FROM DUNDAS POINT JETTY

7.5 LAKHS /200sq.m (3750/Sq.m)

8 LAKHS /200sq.m (4000/Sq.m)

9 LAKHS /200sq.m (4500/Sq.m)

10 LAKHS /200sq.m (5000/Sq.m)

12 LAKHS /200sq.m (6000/Sq.m)

Plot details:-	
1	641.00
2	234.00
3	213.00
4 to 13	200.00 each
14	554.00
15	284.00
16 to 25	240.00 each
26	219.00
27	217.00
28 & 29	200.00 each
30	215.00
31	213.00
32 & 33	200.00 each
34	212.00
35	210.00
36 & 37	200.00 each
38	208.00
39	206.00
40 & 41	200.00 each
42	204.00
43	216.00
44	200.00
45	317.00
46 to 65	200.00 each
66	300.00
67 to 73	200.00 each
74	252.00

BOOK NOW
Free Site Visit Organised

MADAN +91 99320 82432

Bella Bay
TSG HOTELS AND RESORTS

TSG AUTOMOBILES | TSG MRF | TSG CONSTRUCTIONS

LONDON KIDSTM
UK Concept International Preschool Chain
(A Venture of The Ashoka Group | Since 1969)

ADMISSION OPEN 2026-27
Age 1.5 Yrs & Above

PLAY GROUP **NURSERY** **L.K.G • U.K.G**

DAY CARE
AVAILABLE (AGE 1+)

EXTRA ACTIVITIES AVAILABLE
Starting From: 1st April

CHESS CLASSES
Age: 4 Years & Above

DRAWING & PAINTING
Age: 3 Years & Above

TUTION CLASSES
Nursery to Class 6th

For Admission Contact:
06294539772 / 03192-261002
Opp. To Birdline Playground, Near CSC Prothrapur, Sri Vijaya Puram, South Andaman

TEASER

GRAPEVINE

GRAPEVINE
Brutus All: It's a divided saffron house yet again. For one of the two leading political parties in these islands it's business as usual. The two big wigs of the party have continued the war of supremacy within the party.
See page 08

When policy takes a detour...
In administrative and legal parlance, an umbrella order is one that covers a broad area uniformly, bringing multiple sectors, categories, and classes within the ambit of a single directive. When the Andaman & Nicobar Administration issued...
See page 05

Spotted bad food at a Restaurant?...
A stale meal, unhygienic kitchen, expired ingredients or poor food handling at a restaurant is more than just an unpleasant experience—it can pose a serious health risk. ...
See page 03

Are our Islands on life support?
People term the Medical care in Andamans as crumbling facilities
See page 02
Bhasker writes to the Minister seeking airfare cap...
See page 06

Are our Islands on life support? People term the Medical care in Andamans as crumbling facilities



TPP REPORT

Port Blair/Mayabunder: While patients are forced to battle bumpy, long roads to survival in the absence of emergency choppers, the “lone medical college” of the islands, ANIIMS, continues a years-long wait for a basic MRI machine—leaving citizens wondering if healthcare in the Andamans is itself in critical condition. The recent death of a patient who allegedly suffered from medical mishandling at Dr. RP Hospital in Mayabunder has once again trained the spotlight on the crumbling healthcare infrastructure of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. In a telephonic conversation with The

Phoenix Post, the Director of Health Services (DHS), Dr. Siddaraju, addressed the growing public outrage and bureaucratic roadblocks crippling the region’s medical facilities. Responding to allegations of medical negligence at Mayabunder, Dr. Siddaraju disclosed that the administration has sought an explanation from the attending anesthetist. “They have given a written reply,” the Director stated, clarifying that a lady doctor identified as Dr. Sharan or Sharon was the one who initially examined the patient. According to the department’s internal report, the medical team repeatedly consulted with specialists as the patient’s condition deteriorated, claiming the

treatment administered strictly followed expert directions. However, local leaders like former Panchayat Pramukh of Mayabunder area Abdul Siddiqui have sharply criticized the department, alleging severe medical neglect and a systemic failure to look after patients properly. When pressed on the acute shortage of specialist doctors in rural stations, Dr. Siddaraju admitted to the gaps in infrastructure. “According to district hospital standards, it is not sufficient,” he conceded, though he maintained that basic nursing staff and special units, like the local dialysis center, remain adequately manned relative to bed

Continued on page 08

Safety First: Kamorta Schoolchildren trained to prevent Dog Bite risks



Kamorta (Nancowrie Island): In a proactive effort to reduce the risk of stray dog attacks and promote responsible public safety, the Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Services Department conducted an awareness programme for schoolchildren at Government Primary School, Bada Enaka, Nancowrie, equipping them with practical knowledge on preventing dog bites and responding effectively in case of an emergency.

The programme was organised by the Veterinary Dispensary (VD), Kamorta, where the Senior Veterinary Officer sensitised students and teachers on safe behaviour around stray dogs and the importance of timely medical intervention following a bite or scratch.

The session focused on essential precautions, including avoiding provoking stray dogs, maintaining a safe distance from unfamiliar

animals and immediately informing parents or teachers in the event of a bite or scratch. Participants were also taught the critical first-aid procedure of washing the wound thoroughly with soap and running water for at least 15 minutes before seeking immediate medical treatment, a step that significantly reduces the risk of rabies infection.

A total of 22 students and teachers participated in the programme. The interactive session witnessed enthusiastic participation, with students asking questions and engaging in discussions to better understand preventive measures and responsible behaviour around stray animals.

Officials said such awareness initiatives are aimed at building a culture of safety among children while strengthening community awareness on rabies prevention and effective stray dog management.

Young voices bring freedom struggle alive at National Theatre Festival

Patriotic plays on Cellular Jail and Netaji captivate audiences as Andaman joins nationwide cultural celebration

Port Blair: The spirit of patriotism echoed across the Andaman & Nicobar Islands on Wednesday as school students brought the nation’s freedom struggle to life through powerful theatrical performances during the National Theatre Festival 2026, a landmark cultural event held simultaneously across the country to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Vande Mataram and the birth anniversary of Mahakavi Kalidasa. Organised by the Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi, under the Ministry of Culture, in collaboration with the Department of Education, Andaman & Nicobar Administration, the festival was celebrated under the theme “Bharat Speaks Through Theatre | Youth Theatre for National Awakening.” In an unprecedented

nationwide celebration, nearly 150 venues across all 28 States and eight Union Territories hosted more than 150 theatrical productions in 39 languages and dialects, featuring over 4,000 young theatre artists. The performances highlighted India’s diverse theatrical traditions while reinforcing the ideals of national unity, patriotism and cultural heritage. In Sri Vijaya Puram, two moving productions by government school students received widespread appreciation for their compelling portrayal of India’s freedom movement. At the Government Girls’ Senior Secondary School Auditorium, students staged “Kalapani – Cellular Jail ki Pukar,” directed by Shri Naba Kumar Dhar. The 20-minute production vividly depicted the hardships, courage and sacrifices of

freedom fighters imprisoned in the historic Cellular Jail, leaving the audience emotionally moved. Addressing the gathering, Director (Education) Aditya Sangotra highlighted the historic significance of Vande Mataram during India’s freedom struggle and urged students to visit the National Memorial Cellular Jail to better understand its pivotal role in the country’s march towards independence. Meanwhile, at the Government Model Senior Secondary School Auditorium, students of Government Secondary School, Junglighat presented “Netaji – Azadi ka Jwalamukhi,” directed by Shri



Arup Kumar Roy. The play traced the inspiring life and fearless leadership of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, drawing enthusiastic applause from the audience. Speaking on the occasion, Deputy Director of Education (Academics) Gyan Sheel Dubey encouraged the young performers,

observing that patriotism is deeply ingrained in children and should continue to be nurtured through such cultural initiatives. Padmashree Naresh Chandra Lal, General Council Member and Local Coordinator of the Sangeet Natak Akademi,

Continued on page 08

Spotted bad food at a Restaurant? Don't complain, report It: FSSAI's step-by-step guide

A stale meal, unhygienic kitchen, expired ingredients or poor food handling at a restaurant is more than just an unpleasant experience—it can pose a serious health risk. While many customers voice their dissatisfaction to the restaurant staff or post negative reviews online, the most effective way to ensure action is to report the violation to the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI). The FSSAI, through State and Union Territory Food Safety

Departments, is empowered to inspect food businesses, collect samples, initiate legal action and impose penalties for violations of food safety laws. **What Should You Report?** Consumers should immediately report if they notice: Stale, spoiled or contaminated food. Presence of insects, worms or foreign objects in food. Expired or improperly labelled food items. Unhygienic kitchen or dining

conditions. Unsafe food storage or poor hygiene among food handlers. Suspected food poisoning after consuming food. **Step 1: Gather Evidence** Before filing a complaint: Take clear photographs or videos of the food or unhygienic conditions. Keep the purchase bill or payment receipt. Note the restaurant's name, address, date and time of the visit. Preserve the food sample, if possible, in case it is required for testing. **Step 2: File a Complaint** Consumers can lodge complaints through: The Food Safety Connect mobile application. The Food Safety Compliance System (FoSCoS) online grievance portal. The Food Safety Department of the respective State or Union Territory. The national consumer helpline, if the issue also involves consumer rights. Provide complete details along with photographs, videos and



copies of receipts to facilitate prompt investigation. **Step 3: Inspection and Action** Once the complaint is received, Food Safety Officers may: Inspect the restaurant. Collect food samples for laboratory testing. Verify hygiene and licensing compliance. Initiate prosecution or impose penalties where violations are established. Serious offences can lead to suspension or cancellation of licences, heavy fines and prosecution under the Food Safety and Standards Act, 2006.

Know Your Rights Every consumer has the right to safe, hygienic and quality food. Restaurants are legally required to maintain sanitation standards, display valid FSSAI licences and follow prescribed food safety practices. Reporting unsafe food not only protects your own health but also helps safeguard countless other consumers from potential foodborne illnesses. The next time you encounter unsafe or unhygienic food, don't just complain—report it. A few minutes spent filing a complaint can help improve food safety standards and prevent others from becoming victims of negligence.

Continued from page 01

Reconstruction of the age old bridge is welcome;...

that they were “99 to 100 per cent” confident of meeting the revised deadline. However, while hopes have been raised over the restoration of the existing bridge, the inspection has also revived public debate over the proposed Chatham-Bambooflat bridge, which many believe would have permanently addressed the recurring connectivity crisis. The proposal had generated considerable public interest after it was publicly spoken of by a Union Minister during a visit to the Islands. Yet, despite the passage of time, there has been no official announcement regarding its feasibility, funding, approval or status. The absence of any formal clarification has fuelled speculation that the proposal may have been quietly shelved. Almost 8 years since the Gadkari assurance, there is hardly any murmur about the long cherished dream of the islanders. The then State BJP Chief Vishal Jolly who met the Minister in Delhi to get assurance has now gone into oblivion and the incumbent MP and LG too have lost interest in the “pipe dream”. Perhaps the Great Nicobar Project has replaced the Chatham-Bambooflat Bridge. Observers point out that the silence has been particularly striking at a time when commuters continue to suffer daily. Many residents also note that the sitting Member of Parliament has not publicly articulated the present status of the proposed Chatham-Bambooflat bridge, leaving people uncertain about whether the project remains under consideration. The fate of another ambitious connectivity proposal has also become a subject of discussion. During the tenure

of the previous Congress Member of Parliament, a bridge linking Minnie Bay and Mithakhari was proposed to provide a direct road connection between Sri Vijaya Puram and the South Andaman villages. That proposal too has seen no visible progress, with no official update forthcoming in recent years. Against this backdrop, Chairman of the Campaign Committee of the Andaman & Nicobar Territorial Congress Committee (ANTCC), G. Bhasker, has expressed concern over the prolonged delay in restoring the Chatham Bridge. In a representation to the Administration, he urged the authorities to expedite the ongoing works and ensure early completion to alleviate the hardship being faced by thousands of commuters. Transport experts and local residents argue that while restoration of the century-old Chatham Bridge is essential, it cannot substitute the long-term need for additional permanent road connectivity across the harbour. They contend that the increasing population, rising vehicle density and expanding economic activity require modern infrastructure capable of supporting future growth rather than relying solely on ageing assets. As work on the Chatham Bridge gathers pace, public attention is now shifting beyond the restoration project itself to a larger question that remains unanswered: Have the long-promised bridge projects for South Andaman been deferred indefinitely, or do they still figure in the government's infrastructure roadmap? Until an official clarification is issued, that question is likely to continue resonating among thousands of islanders who navigate the route every day.

The Green Tank and the Empty Well

The afternoon sun beats down mercilessly on a bustling fuel station in central Delhi. Ramesh Kumar, a forty-two-year-old ride-share driver, stares anxiously at the digital digits ticking upward on the petrol dispenser. For the past decade, this silver hatchback has been his family's lifeline, funding his children's schooling and paying off a steep home loan. But lately, Ramesh feels a quiet dread every time he pulls up to the pump. “The car feels sluggish, and the mileage has visibly dropped over the last few months,” Ramesh says, tapping his steering wheel with calloused fingers. “We don't get regular petrol anymore; it's all E20 now. When you live on tight daily margins, losing even two kilometers per liter means cutting back on household groceries at the end of the month.” Ramesh is not alone. Across India's urban landscapes, a quiet anxiety has gripped millions of motorists navigating the mandatory rollout of petrol blended with 20% ethanol. What macroeconomists celebrate as a masterstroke of energy security—saving the national exchequer a massive ₹1.9 lakh crore in foreign exchange—translates to a gritty, daily negotiation for the average driver balancing a household budget. Seven hundred kilometers away, in the lush, green expanses of



western Maharashtra's sugar belt, the narrative shifts entirely. For Vitthal Patil, a third-generation sugarcane farmer, the E20 mandate smells like dignity and financial survival. For years, Vitthal was trapped in a crippling cycle of delayed payments from local sugar mills, watching his debts pile up while his harvest rotted in the sun. “The ethanol push changed everything for us,” Vitthal says, standing beside a towering wall of bright green cane crops. “Now, the mills buy our crop directly for juice-to-ethanol diversion. The payments come on time, directly into our bank accounts. For the first time in years, I don't have to beg the local moneylender to buy seeds for the next season.” Yet, Vitthal's prosperity carries a silent, ecological price tag. Sugarcane is a notoriously water-guzzling crop, requiring nearly 2,000 liters of water to produce

just one kilogram of sugar. In a region where groundwater tables are plummeting to historic lows, the booming ethanol distilleries are drinking the land dry. The very water that secures India's energy shield is being pumped out from the future of Vitthal's grandchildren. Back in Delhi, Union Ministers aggressively defend the policy against political and social media backlashes, confidently challenging critics to name a single vehicle objectively ruined by the blend. But for the people on the ground, the reality is far more nuanced than a political debate. The E20 policy has effectively bound Ramesh and Vitthal to the same economic ecosystem. As India drives forward into its high-octane biofuel future, the true challenge lies in ensuring that the fuel saving Ramesh's country doesn't end up emptying Vitthal's well or breaking Ramesh's livelihood.

EDITORIAL

17 July, 2026

Green Milestone or Greenwashing?

India's rapid march toward achieving a mandatory, country-wide rollout of E20 petrol—petrol blended with 20% ethanol—is an undeniable milestone in its energy transition strategy. By accelerating its target by five years, the government has successfully curbed foreign exchange leakages on crude oil imports while carving out a lucrative, state-guaranteed market for rural agrarian communities. Yet, as the domestic supply chain shifts gear into an era dominated by E20, the macroeconomic accolades must be weighed against localized ecological anxieties.

The central government, however, firmly positions the E20 mandate as an indispensable “energy shield” for the nation. Union Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Singh Puri has vigorously defended the rollout against public skepticism, dismissing concerns over engine wear and heavy mileage drops as mere “misrepresentation.” Backed by studies from the Automotive Research Association of India (ARAI), the Ministry maintains that E20 is a cleaner, higher-octane fuel that has already saved over ₹1.9 lakh crore in foreign exchange and diverted massive capital directly to farmers.

Bolstering this institutional push, Union Road Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari has categorically rejected allegations of engine damage, framing the initiative as a major step toward an Aatmanirbhar (self-reliant) India, while bluntly noting that consumers who insist on pure, ethanol-free petrol must be prepared to pay a premium price. Yet, beneath this robust administrative defense lies a fundamental trade-off between energy security and resource sustainability. The current model relies heavily on first-generation feedstocks: sugar-heavy molasses, sugarcane juice, and water-guzzling grains like rice and maize. Diverting vast tracts of arable land to feed fuel distilleries rather than human populations poses a silent threat to long-term food security and crop diversification. In a country ranking high on global hunger indices, using food grains to fuel passenger cars demands a cautious ethical audit. Furthermore, the massive water footprint required to cultivate these crops sharpens the crisis in regions already grappling with structural groundwater depletion.

While the Centre exercises deliberate caution on moving further to E25 until rigorous industry testing concludes, the immediate E20 landscape remains fraught with friction. For this transition to endure as a genuine green triumph rather than a forced logistical shift, India must pivot its investment layout toward second-generation (2G) cellulosic biofuels derived from agricultural waste and crop residues. Only by breaking the link between the fuel tank and the food basket can the nation achieve a truly sustainable, low-carbon future.

HOORAY, I HAVE SNORKELED & I AM ALIVE!

S. BALAKRISHNAN

‘NO, NO, NO! No chance at all, I am not diving in for snorkeling.’ I firmly held the edge of the speedboat that was already dangerously dancing above the deep waters off Havelock Island (later renamed Swaraj). There was not a soul around for nautical miles and the shore was a thin line far off. And, all four of us did not know swimming. Of course, we swim in knee-deep waters during Chennai floods every year but this was totally a new scary experience. As if this lack of skill was not scary enough I suddenly remembered an astrologer’s warning that I had danger (ghantam) in water (thanni). And the depth was really scary, adding to my ingrained fear of deep water – thalassophobia or whatever you call it. But my wife insisted that snorkeling was once in a lifetime chance and I should not miss it out at all. At that moment I realized the true meaning of the phrase ‘between the devi(l) and the deep sea’! Her name ends with Devi but her insistence now made her appear like a Devil. What was her motive, I wondered; I had not even insured my life.

To her credit she was the first to snorkel successfully. I said, like a true gentleman, ‘Ladies First!’ She genuinely believed my words and jumped in. Believe me, I had no ulterior motive! As the guide led her we three sat in the boat like dolls, without any movement, lest the boat tilt. Horrific



scenes from the movie Titanic rolled before me. As my wife got into the boat after snorkeling it tilted and I sincerely called all the gods & goddesses for help. I wondered what would happen when our hefty son and I got in, if at all I jumped out. Our son and daughter bravely went for snorkeling and enjoyed it thoroughly. I had to beg them to return. They enticed me that a mermaid was waiting for me. ‘Sorry, not interested, I can’t live with her in deep waters; when I already have a Devi why do I need a mermaid’, I declined the invite. By the by, why only mermaids, why don’t we hear much about merman? I was curious about this and enquired the boatman, a youth, if he had ever seen a merman. He just threw a pathetic look at me. I told the boatman that I would pay him extra bucks if he would very kindly permit me to sit in the boat itself, dip out only my head into the waters and snorkel! He wondered what a novel way of snorkeling! He assured me that it was ‘only’ ten feet deep. Yet the view was so clear and appeared so near! Thus my very first snorkeling experience turned out to be dramatically scary and, therefore, ever etched in my memory since 2009. **Hooray! I have snorkeled and I am also alive!**

We reached Havelock Island on the 9th day of our holidaying in Andamans. Oh, don’t be surprised of our long stay; in fact, we stayed for full 15 days! I was visiting the Islands after 30 years and my family members were on a first trip. The truth is we were not satisfied even with the 15-day stay. So enchanting are the Andaman Islands; unfortunately, we could not visit the Nicobars! Though Havelock has been renamed ‘Swaraj’, somehow I prefer the old name as I am used to it since 1978; old habits die hard, right? We landed on Havelock shore at 4.30 PM the previous evening from Neil Island (oops, it has now been renamed ‘Shaheed’ but never mind). The bunk class fare was Rs.195/per head. Attracted by its quaint village atmosphere I wished we had stayed overnight in Neil Island itself. The open jeep ride straight to Radha Nagar beach was so exciting; I would even say it was the highlight

of our Havelock trip. The young driver had switched on the music system that played out the remix of the Bollywood song Nazaara Hai from the movie ‘Tasveer’, most aptly suiting our adventurous and happy mood. Till sunset we enjoyed in the serene, waist-deep waters and then went to the seaside resort. I was happy with waist-deep waters as my feet were firmly on the sand and my head above waters. The



rent for a double-bedded room was Rs. 800. We ate our supper at the resort itself as there was no other go. It was June when we visited, so there wasn’t the mad & irritating rush of tourists as the schools had reopened. Oh, what a relief! We felt lucky as if we owned the Havelock Island and its pristine beaches.

We woke up with much expectation of our snorkeling trip and rushed out after breakfast to board the speedboat. As we had to check out at 8 AM, we dumped our luggage at the reception counter. While snorkeling I felt the lack of tourists. There was no one else around to help in case of emergency, and our snorkeling guide-cum-boatman was just a lanky boy. Meanwhile, dark clouds had gathered giving an ominous touch to my never-ending pessimistic thoughts. It started drizzling also, so we returned to the resort’s shore by 10.15 AM. As the boat neared the shore I flouted the rule ‘Ladies First’ to jump



out first and heaved a great sigh of relief when I firmly stood on terra firma. Well, we all enjoyed the 1000 rupee snorkeling trip according to our own emotions. We then frolicked in the waist-deep waters for more than an hour like lazy crocodiles, clutching to some broken tree trunks. Talking of crocodiles, I am reminded of a sad incident in Havelock waters after our trip. A foreign lady tourist was dragged by a croc here even as her boyfriend was filming her. She was never traced. If this had only happened before our arrival, I would not have touched the waters at all. After lunch at the resort itself, we left for jetty by 1PM paying a hefty 500 rupees for jeep ride. The inter-island ferry MV Bambooka picked us up and sailed off from Havelock for Port Blair (later renamed Sri Vijaya Puram) at 2 PM on her Voyage No. 189. Luckily the air conditioning worked smoothly on this trip. The tickets had PNR number along with marked seating! I thought what a sea of change since 1978.

Well, we also successfully snorkeled at Red Skin Island and at North Bay but they were not really deep waters, so not as scary and ‘memorable’ as the snorkeling experience off-Havelock.

...krishnanbala2004@yahoo.co.in/9840917608 (Whatsapp)

OPINION

When policy takes a detour, the selective compliance raises questions

By DEBKUMAR BHADRA

In administrative and legal parlance, an umbrella order is one that covers a broad area uniformly, bringing multiple sectors, categories, and classes within the ambit of a single directive. When the Andaman & Nicobar Administration issued Letter No. 5-1/2010-TR(PF) in February 2015, authorising a uniform annual upward fare revision of 5% across all sectors and classes of DSS-operated vessels, it issued exactly what fits into that definition of an umbrella order. One directive. One rate. Every sector named. Every commuter fully covered. What the islanders got instead was an umbrella that covers only half: For eleven years, the same order has been

followed almost exactly in the mainland-island shipping sector. But in the inter-island, harbour and foreshore sectors, the approved rate has been repeatedly exceeded, in some categories by more than double. The governing document, Letter No. 5-1/2010-TR(PF) dated 16 February 2015, authorised the Director of Shipping Services to revise passenger and vehicle ferry fares annually by 5% across all DSS-operated vessels in the mainland-island, inter-island, harbour and foreshore sectors. Yet, while every subsequent fare revision has cited this approval, the actual revisions tell a different story. The latest 2026-27 order once again invokes the 2015 policy but departs from it in the inter-island, harbour and foreshore

sectors, where DSS enjoys a virtual monopoly. With no alternative ferry operators on most routes, the approved rate is the only safeguard commuters have against arbitrary fare escalation. The disparity is evident. A harbour ferry fare of ₹8 in 2016-17 should have reached about ₹13 today under the approved 5% annual increase. Instead, it stands at ₹16. Similarly, a two-wheeler ferry fare that should have been around ₹33 has risen to ₹65. On the Sri Vijaya Puram-Kadamtala route, the passenger fare has increased from ₹45 to ₹135 over the decade, whereas policy compliance would have placed it at around ₹73. The burden falls squarely on daily commuters, patients, workers, students and small traders. The issue did not go unnoticed. Earlier this year, Paani Paar Ki Awaaz, along with Ekta Manch and the Boat Solutions group, submitted representations highlighting the policy deviation and sought rollback of excess fares, transparent tariff regulation, fleet augmentation, public consultation and commuter safeguards. However, the revised fares were implemented without any corrective action. The fare anomaly reflects a deeper structural problem.



DSS fare revisions continue without an independent tariff regulator, transparent cost audits, defined service benchmarks or mandatory public consultation. At the same time, ferry infrastructure and fleet capacity have seen little improvement despite rising commuter demand. It would be unfair not to acknowledge that expenditure on fuel, operation and maintenance costs have gone up. But that is precisely what the 2015 approval letter was meant to provide. A predictable and uniform mechanism for annual revision across all sectors alike. What has happened instead is selective compliance: The remedy, however, is neither complex nor radical. It just requires DSS to apply the approved rate in letter and spirit.

That is not a reform. It is compliance. It is the protection that the umbrella order promised. Ferry services in these islands are not just a commercial operation. They are the connective links of island life — between shores, communities, workplaces, schools, hospitals and markets. In island territories worldwide, such services are governed by principles of affordability and public welfare. Not by economics alone. The A&N Islands deserve no less. Island commuters who have spent eleven years paying beyond the approved rate are not asking for anything extraordinary. They are only asking that the umbrella be held the right way — over every sector as it was originally meant to cover.



Satire

Education is the root of all troubles

By MANMOHAN SINGH 'DANISH'

Look, sir, a learned man remains learned, even if he becomes a state's Education Minister. Recently, Bihar's Education Minister raised a very important question: What is the need for education anyway? He has a point. After all, what is one supposed to do after getting educated? There are no jobs waiting. Besides, schools and colleges seem destined for closure anyway. These educated cockroaches only spread dirt and trouble. First, you make students sit for examinations like NEET, then you cancel them. The simple truth is that education was never meant for poor people. It only ruins their lives. Children get spoiled in schools. Boys and girls start falling in love. And love, unfortunately, does not bother

to check caste, religion or social status before striking. This begins to unravel the social fabric. Then come honour killings, communal tensions, riots, deaths and displaced families. Wouldn't it be far better to shut down schools altogether? The government would save money and the nation's culture would remain intact. The rich and powerful, of course, have nothing to worry about. Their children will continue to study abroad. Those children become the nation's pride. The problem arises when the child of an ordinary citizen gets educated. Then he starts asking questions. He begins looking for logic in everything. Now tell me, should our leaders run the country or spend their time answering questions from educated citizens? These educated young

people are dangerous. They can even understand budget documents that many senior leaders themselves struggle to comprehend. Those documents are full of long numbers and complicated figures that some of our "learned" ministers can neither read nor pronounce. This embarrasses Parliament and undermines the dignity of democracy. A prominent BJP leader, who also serves as a party spokesperson and is counted among the party's intellectual heavyweights, recently declared with great confidence that Jawaharlal Nehru had praised an enemy of India on page 240 of his book The Discovery of India. To verify this claim, this writer pulled the book from his library and examined every single line on page 240. Nothing of the sort was there. There was indeed a reference

to that invader several pages later. But upon reading the entire passage, it became clear that Nehru was actually criticizing him sharply. Had this writer been less educated, he might have accepted the spokesperson's claim without question. Perhaps the gentleman assumed that nobody would bother checking. After all, if he had not read The Discovery of India, why would anyone else have read it? People remaining uneducated suits such individuals perfectly. There is only one solution to all these "problems": keep everyone uneducated. If people do not read, they will not ask questions. If they do not ask questions, whatever the minister says becomes the truth. Education, after all, is the enemy of unquestioning obedience. An educated citizen may

verify facts, examine evidence and challenge falsehoods. Such behaviour is clearly hazardous to those who prefer blind acceptance. Therefore, in the national interest, let us keep books at a safe distance. Ignorance is the foundation of good governance, and knowledge is a threat to peace of mind. Which brings us back to the minister's profound question: "What's the need for education?" Suggested Sarcastic Caption "Education: The Dangerous Habit of Checking Facts Before Believing Politicians." Alternative captions: "An educated citizen is a politician's worst nightmare." "Why read books when ministers can think for you?" "Ignorance is bliss. Knowledge asks inconvenient questions." "Keep Calm and Stop Educating the Poor."

TRAVEL TIP

Limestone Caves – Nature's Hidden Masterpiece at Baratang

Tucked away amidst the dense mangrove creeks of Baratang Island, the spectacular Limestone Caves are among the most fascinating natural attractions of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. Formed over thousands of years by the slow deposition of calcium carbonate, the caves are adorned with stunning stalactites hanging from the ceiling and stalagmites rising from the ground, creating breathtaking natural sculptures. The journey to the caves is an adventure in itself. Visitors first travel through a serene mangrove creek by fibre boat, where the calm waters and overhanging mangrove roots provide a unique glimpse into one of the islands' richest coastal ecosystems. A short walk through tropical forest then leads to the cave entrance. The caves remain cool throughout the year, making them an enjoyable destination even during warmer months. Visitors are advised not to touch the limestone formations, as the delicate structures take centuries to develop and can be damaged easily. A visit to the Limestone Caves is often combined with a trip to the nearby Mud Volcano, making Baratang one of the most rewarding day-trip destinations from Sri Vijaya Puram (Port Blair).

Location: Baratang Island (Approx. 100km from Sri Vijaya Puram)

Best Time to Visit: November – April

Ideal For: Nature Lovers, Photography, Adventure & Family Excursions

Bhasker writes to the Minister seeking airfare cap as a sky-high ticket prices hit Islanders, Tourism

Port Blair: Airfares on the Andaman-mainland sectors have once again come under scrutiny, with the Andaman & Nicobar Territorial Congress Committee (ANTCC) urging the Centre to step in and regulate soaring ticket prices, describing affordable air connectivity as a necessity rather than a luxury for the Islands.

G. Bhasker, Chairman of the Campaign Committee of ANTCC, has written to the Union Minister for Civil Aviation seeking immediate intervention to cap airfares on flights connecting Sri Vijaya Puram with Delhi, Chennai, Kolkata, Visakhapatnam and other mainland cities.

In his representation, Bhasker said the absence of any effective fare regulation has made air travel prohibitively expensive for islanders, who rely almost entirely on flights for higher education, specialised medical treatment, employment, business



and family emergencies. Highlighting the steep rise in fares, he cited his recent journey, stating that two one-way tickets from Delhi to Sri Vijaya Puram cost ₹73,662. Bhasker contended that exorbitant airfares are imposing a severe financial burden on residents while simultaneously affecting the tourism sector by discouraging potential visitors. He also expressed concern over the reduction in flight frequencies during the lean tourist season, saying that limited seat availability further drives up ticket prices.

Calling for urgent policy intervention, he urged the

Ministry of Civil Aviation to introduce a ceiling on airfares, ensure affordable year-round pricing, increase flight frequencies, encourage greater competition among airlines, provide concessional fares for patients travelling for specialised medical treatment, and operate additional flights during peak travel seasons. Emphasising that dependable and affordable air connectivity is the lifeline of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Bhasker appealed to the Centre to adopt a fair airfare policy that would safeguard the interests of islanders while providing a much-needed boost to the tourism industry.

High-end eco-resorts as catalyst for sustainable tourism and revenue growth in Andaman & Nicobar

Even as the officialdom claims to have a steady increase in the tourist arrivals to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the need for world-class yet environmentally sustainable tourism infrastructure has become more pressing than ever. Experts believe that carefully planned high-end hospitality projects can significantly enhance the Islands' tourism potential, attract higher-spending visitors, generate substantial long-term revenue and create employment opportunities, while preserving the fragile ecology that makes the archipelago unique.

In this direction, two five-star eco-tourism resort projects proposed under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model are expected to play an important role in strengthening the Islands' tourism ecosystem. The projects involve the redevelopment of the Megapode Resort at Sri Vijaya Puram and the

development of a luxury eco-tourism resort at Shaheed Dweep. These facilities are expected to augment the existing hospitality infrastructure, encourage longer tourist stays and increase visitor spending, thereby benefiting hotels, transport operators, tour guides, restaurants, handicraft businesses and other tourism-related sectors.

The Shaheed Dweep resort will be developed under a 75-year concession agreement, while the Megapode Resort redevelopment will operate under a 50-year concession. Both projects have a construction period of three years before commercial operations commence.

The projects are being implemented by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIIDCO) under the PPP model, with the objective of leveraging private investment to create modern, internationally

benchmarked tourism infrastructure without placing an additional financial burden on the public exchequer.

The emphasis, however, remains on ensuring that development is environmentally responsible. Given the ecological sensitivity of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, the projects are expected to adhere to all statutory environmental safeguards and sustainable construction practices so that tourism growth does not come at the cost of the archipelago's rich biodiversity and natural heritage.

The emphasis came during a meeting between Lieutenant Governor Admiral D.K. Joshi (Retd.) and the top management of Sheeraj Projects Private Limited, the concessionaire selected for developing two five-star eco-tourism resorts under the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model. The delegation, led by the company's Chairman,



Rajender Singh Pannu, called on the Lt. Governor at Raj Niwas on Monday.

Industry observers have often pointed out that despite possessing some of the country's most spectacular beaches, coral reefs and tropical forests, the Islands have long faced a shortage of premium accommodation capable of attracting affluent domestic and international travellers. The creation of quality eco-friendly resorts is therefore seen as an important step towards positioning the archipelago as a globally competitive, high-value tourism destination.

If executed as envisaged, the projects have the potential to deliver long-term benefits through increased tourism revenue, greater private investment, enhanced employment opportunities for islanders, improved visitor experience and stronger support for local enterprises. Equally important, they can demonstrate that economic growth and environmental conservation can go hand in hand, ensuring that tourism development remains sustainable and beneficial for the Andaman and Nicobar Islands for decades to come.

Great Nicobar: Can a mega development project justify the loss of an irreplaceable ecosystem?

As policymakers speak of balancing strategic infrastructure with environmental conservation, the proposed Great Nicobar mega project raises a larger question: can any amount of mitigation compensate for the irreversible loss of one of India's richest biodiversity hotspots and the disruption of indigenous ways of life? The latest high-level deliberations on the proposed Great Nicobar infrastructure project have once again brought to the fore a question that extends far beyond regulatory approvals and environmental clearances. At its heart lies a difficult choice between pursuing strategic and economic ambitions and preserving an island ecosystem that has remained largely untouched for thousands of years. During the meeting between Lieutenant Governor Admiral D.K. Joshi and Chandra Prakash Goyal, Chairman of the High-Level Committee of the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and Chairman of the Central Empowered Committee (CEC), along with Dr. Satya Prakash Yadav, Permanent

Member of the High-Level Committee and Director General of the International Big Cat Alliance, discussions focused on environmental compliance, diversion of forest land, compensatory afforestation, Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), Island Coastal Regulation Zone (ICRZ) regulations, and safeguards for indigenous tribal communities. While these discussions reflect an acknowledgement of the environmental sensitivities involved, they also expose the enormous challenge of reconciling a project of unprecedented scale with the ecological realities of Great Nicobar Island. Great Nicobar is not merely another tract of land awaiting development. It is one of India's last remaining intact tropical rainforest landscapes, harbouring extraordinary biological diversity, endemic flora and fauna, globally significant nesting beaches, mangrove ecosystems, coral reefs and dense evergreen forests that have evolved over centuries. These ecosystems function as interconnected natural systems where the loss



of one component inevitably affects countless others. The proposed project, involving extensive infrastructure and associated urban expansion, inevitably raises concerns over habitat fragmentation, forest diversion, increased human intervention and long-term ecological disturbance. Even when every statutory condition is complied with, the ecological consequences of transforming vast stretches of pristine forest cannot simply be wished away through regulatory safeguards. Compensatory afforestation,

often cited as a mitigation measure, remains one of the most debated aspects of large development projects. While planting trees elsewhere may satisfy legal requirements, newly planted forests cannot replicate the ecological richness, genetic diversity and intricate relationships that characterise centuries-old natural rainforests. Ancient ecosystems are not replaceable assets; once lost, they are gone for generations, if not forever. Equally significant is the question of indigenous rights. Great Nicobar is home to

the Shompen, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group whose culture, livelihood and identity remain inseparable from the island's forests. Although official assurances emphasise protection against displacement and safeguarding tribal interests, experts have long argued that the impact of large-scale infrastructure extends beyond physical relocation. Roads, settlements, increased human activity and changing land-use patterns can fundamentally alter the social

Continued on page 08

What is the difference between Indian nationality and citizenship?

How can one know if they are an Indian national or a citizen? How is citizenship decided? What documents are required to prove your nationality or Indian citizenship? These questions have become relevant, especially after the Ministry of External Affairs clarified that a passport is a travel document, not proof of citizenship. Citizenship vs Nationality: Many use citizenship and nationality interchangeably, but legally, they are different. Nationality is a broader concept. It is acquired by birth or adoption, marriage, or descent. Citizenship, meanwhile, is a specific legal relationship between a state and a person, bestowing certain rights and responsibilities. It does not have to accompany nationality, according to the Centre for Development Policy and Practice. Nationality is a cultural and ethnic bond to a country where a person was born or has heritage. If you were born in India or trace your roots there,

your nationality is Indian. However, a person acquires citizenship only after fulfilling legal prerequisites. It is the legal status granted by the government. It grants specific rights such as voting and holding a passport. Regarding passports as proof of citizenship, the Ministry of External Affairs officials said that a passport's primary legal purpose is to facilitate international travel and establish the holder's nationality abroad, according to the New Indian Express. Here are the key differences between citizenship and nationality: How are citizenship and nationality decided? One's nationality is determined by the place of birth or by ancestral roots (or inheritance). Meanwhile, an Indian citizenship is decided by: Birth: If you have been born in India Descent: If you have been born to Indian Parent(s) outside India Registration/ Any foreigner, on becoming

eligible, can acquire citizenship by registration or by naturalisation irrespective of his country or community. How can you prove your citizenship and nationality? There is no single document to prove Indian citizenship. Even, the government is not clear about what all documents would be acceptable in establishing citizenship. In 2019, an official press release, pertaining to clarification regarding NRC and CAA, stated that citizenship can be proved by submitting any documents related to the date of birth and place of birth. However, a decision is yet to be taken on such acceptable documents. These documents are likely to include voter cards, passports, Aadhaar, licenses, insurance papers, birth certificates, school leaving certificates, documents relating to land or home or other similar documents issued by government officials, PIB says. Then, why did government say Aadhaar, passport do not



prove citizenship? A person's citizenship is a relevant factor in the issuance of a passport. As per Section 6 of the Passports Act, one of the grounds for refusing a passport is that the applicant is not a citizen of India, Live Law claims. Live Law notes that documents such as driving license, PAN card, Aadhaar etc do not take into account the citizenship of a person. 'Residency' is the factor considered as relevant by the concerned authorities for issuing these documents. For example, in the case of a driving license, an applicant is required to furnish proof of address in the concerned state

and also proof of age. Aadhaar, though intended as a national-level unique identity marker, is not a proof of citizenship. Under the Aadhaar Act, a person's residency in India for 182 days prior to the date of application is the relevant factor for issuing Aadhaar number. As regards the PAN card, it is a document for the payment of income tax in India. Even foreign citizens/entities, who are bound to pay income tax in India, can obtain PAN card. So these documents per se do not prove citizenship, Live Law states. These documents could, however, corroborate facts relevant for citizenship.

➤ **Brutus All:** It's a divided saffron house yet again. For one of the two leading political parties in these islands it's business as usual. The two big wigs of the party have continued the war of supremacy within the party. They use all tactics, fair or unfair, to satisfy their egos caring two hoots about the image of the party. Currently, the party boss has become the target of a calumny campaign. Acting at the behest of the 'loose cannon', a turn coat leaves no opportunity to find fault with the party chief even if there is none. Who is stoking the fires of revolt? None other than the man who once famously threatened to pee at the gate.



* Disclaimer: The pieces above are a work of satire. Any resemblance to anyone is purely coincidental.

Continued from page 07

Great Nicobar: Can a mega development project justify the loss...

and ecological environment upon which indigenous communities depend.

The concerns are not limited to forests alone. Great Nicobar lies in a seismically active zone that has witnessed devastating earthquakes and tsunamis in the past. Large-scale alteration of coastal landscapes, increased construction activity and intensified human presence inevitably invite questions about long-term environmental resilience and disaster preparedness in one of India's most fragile island regions.

Supporters of the project argue that it will strengthen India's strategic presence in the Indian Ocean, improve connectivity and create new economic opportunities. These are legitimate national objectives. However, the critical question is whether these goals can be achieved without permanently compromising an ecosystem that performs invaluable environmental services not only for the islands but for the wider region.

Development and conservation need not always be opposing

forces. Yet genuine sustainable development requires recognising ecological limits rather than assuming technology and mitigation can overcome every environmental constraint. In landscapes as fragile as Great Nicobar, the margin for irreversible error is exceptionally small.

The recent meeting rightly stressed strict compliance with environmental laws and regulatory safeguards. However, compliance alone should not become a substitute for asking the more fundamental question: whether a project of such magnitude is environmentally appropriate for one of India's most pristine and biologically significant islands.

History offers numerous examples where ecosystems were sacrificed in the name of development, only for societies to realise decades later that the environmental costs far exceeded the anticipated benefits. Great Nicobar presents India with an opportunity to demonstrate that national progress need not come at the expense of

irreplaceable natural heritage.

The debate, therefore, is no longer confined to obtaining environmental clearances or fulfilling statutory conditions. It is about defining the kind of development the country wishes to pursue—one that measures success solely through infrastructure and economic expansion, or one that recognises biodiversity, ecological resilience and indigenous heritage as national assets whose value cannot be quantified in project reports.

The future of Great Nicobar will ultimately serve as a test of India's commitment to sustainable development. The decisions taken today will shape not only the destiny of one island but also the legacy left for future generations. Once an ancient rainforest is fragmented, once a unique ecosystem is disrupted and once traditional communities lose the environmental fabric that sustains them, restoration can never fully recover what has been lost. The choices made now will therefore echo far beyond Great Nicobar's shores.

Continued from page 02

Are our Islands on life support? People term the Medical care in Andamans...

capacity.

The crisis in Mayabunder is further compounded by the absence of an emergency helicopter facility, which forced the critically ill patient to endure a grueling road journey to GB Pant Hospital in Port Blair—a delay that locals argue ultimately cost the patient their life.

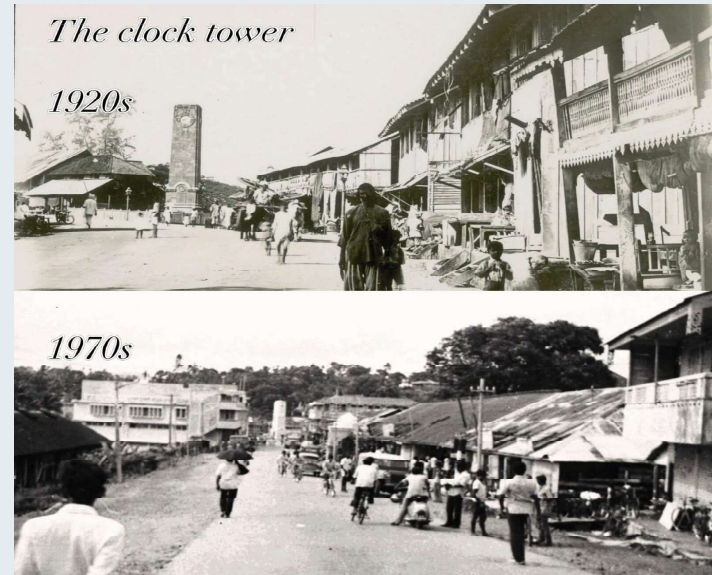
Yet, reaching the capital city offers no guarantee of comprehensive care. GB Pant Hospital, recognized as the premier hospital of the lone Medical College of the islands

(ANIIMS), has famously lacked an MRI facility for years. Dr. Siddaraju confirmed that while the CT scan machine is functional, the procurement of a crucial 1.5 Tesla MRI machine—estimated to cost between ₹15 Crore and ₹20 Crore—has been stuck in administrative limbo. "The previous proposal was dropped because the technical specifications and the bidding process could not be finalized," Dr. Siddaraju revealed. While he stated that a fresh proposal has now

been drafted and submitted to the competent authority for specification clearance, the Director remained non-committal on a timeline for when islanders can actually expect the machine to arrive, noting only that it is under "active consideration." As bureaucratic processes drag on, residents of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands continue to pay the price, caught between under-equipped district hospitals and a premier referral hospital missing vital diagnostic tools.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Clock Tower



The Clock Tower or the War Memorial at Port Blair, popularly known as Ghanta Ghar in the local circle, is one of the most iconic landmarks of the capital city of Andaman.

It commemorates the glorious dead of the First World War, including members of the Andaman & Nicobar Military Police who lost their lives in action. Built during 1921–22, this historic monument has silently witnessed countless untold stories of the Andaman & Nicobar Islands.

RECIPE CORNER

Island Style

Tuna Coconut Stir-Fry

A quick, healthy and flavourful island delight with a coconut twist

Tuna is a staple seafood in the Andaman & Nicobar Islands. This simple stir-fry combines fresh tuna with grated coconut, aromatic spices and vegetables for a light, wholesome and delicious meal.

INGREDIENTS

- 500 gm fresh tuna (cubed)
- 1 cup grated coconut
- 1 onion (sliced)
- 1 tomato (chopped)
- 2 green chillies (slit)
- 1 sprig curry leaves
- 1 tsp mustard seeds
- ½ tsp turmeric powder
- 1 tsp red chilli flakes
- 2 tbsp coconut oil
- Salt to taste
- ½ tsp lemon juice

PREPARATION

Step 1 Marinate tuna pieces with turmeric powder, red chilli flakes and a pinch of salt for 15 minutes.

Step 2 Heat coconut oil in a pan. Add mustard seeds and let them splutter.

Step 3 Add curry leaves, onions and green chillies. Sauté until onions turn soft.

Step 4 Add tomatoes and cook until they become soft and oil separates.

Step 5 Add marinated tuna pieces and cook on medium flame for 5–7 minutes.

Step 6 Add grated coconut, mix gently and cook for another 2–3 minutes. Finish with lemon juice. Serve hot.

SERVING SUGGESTION

Best served with:

- steamed rice
- coconut rice
- chapati

HEALTH NOTE

Tuna is an excellent source of:

- high-quality protein
- omega-3 fatty acids
- essential for heart, brain and muscle health

FOOD FACT

Tuna is rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which help reduce inflammation, support heart health and improve brain function. It is a great choice for a balanced diet.

Try this recipe and share your feedback with us! Your kitchen stories inspire our island community.

Continued from page 02

Young voices bring freedom struggle alive...

was also present.

Both productions were widely appreciated for their powerful storytelling, impressive direction, music, stagecraft and the outstanding performances delivered by the young artistes. Teachers, students, parents, theatre lovers and members of the public attended the performances in large numbers, applauding the commitment and talent of the participating schools. Held on the occasion of Mahakavi Kalidasa Jayanti,

the festival celebrated not only the enduring legacy of Vande Mataram but also honoured one of India's greatest literary luminaries. By bringing together young artistes from diverse regions, languages and cultural backgrounds, the National Theatre Festival reaffirmed theatre's enduring role as a powerful medium to preserve heritage, inspire patriotism and ignite national consciousness among the youth.