



Heritage Centre, IIT Madras presents

Volume 3 - Issue 1

GlaSS PANEls

January
2025

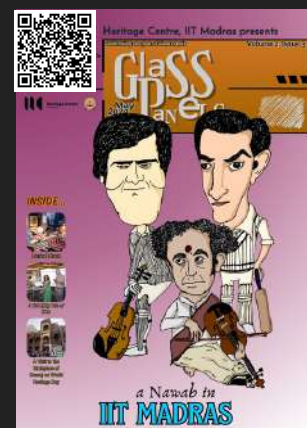
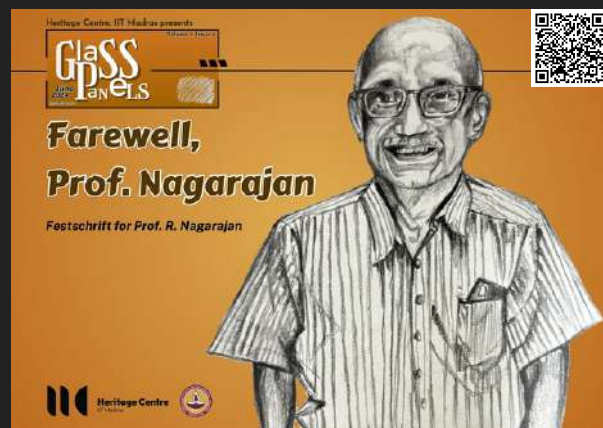


Heritage Centre
IIT Madras



E I N E D E U T S C H E V E R B I N D U N G
A G E R M A N C O N N E C T I O N

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Prof. Dieter Kind used
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Acknowledgements

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Mr. Johannes Kind
Prof. H. K. Panigrahi
Prof. Y. Narayana Rao
Dr. Mymoon Moghul



The Heritage Centre was formally inaugurated by Dr. Arcot Ramachandran, former Director of IIT Madras, on 3 March 2006. It is a repository of material of heritage value and historical significance to IIT Madras. "Heritage Centre - Reimagined" was inaugurated on 18 December 2022 by Mrs. Nirmala Sitharaman, Honourable Finance Minister of India.

Located centrally on campus, the Heritage Centre has an exhibition space that enjoys an abundance of natural light. The Centre also has a small theatre and a particularly pleasant reading area that offers incomparable views of the green campus.



Panel of Contents

01

Letter from the Editor

Bhuvanesh Santharam

The Heritage Centre has been buzzing with events the last couple of months...find out why!

02

Amusing Museum Musings

Bhuva

Fun toons from the staff room of the Heritage Centre.

03

An Anecdotal Reference to Tree Planting at IIT Madras

Prof. Y. Narayana Rao

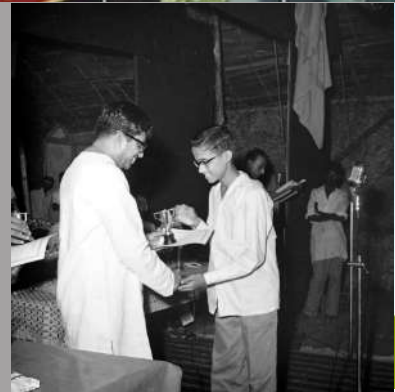
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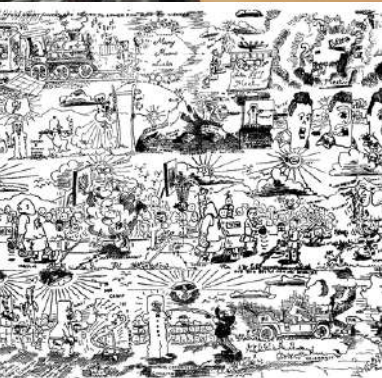
05

Memoirs of Ragging

H. K. Panigrahi

Ragging, but with a twist!





Dam(n) the River!

07

Bhuvanesh Santharam

What do we do when a river emerges from a wall at the Heritage Centre?!

Diamond Jubilee Reunion, December 2024

08

Heritage Centre Staff

Images from the Diamond Jubilee Reunion of the 1964 and 1965 batches of IIT Madras.

The Heritage Square

11

Left Hook Lokesh

A smorgasbord of content awaits you here. A puzzle and a few pieces from the Campastimes archives!

Visitors to the Centre

12

Diya Mariam Satheesh

Ministers, entrepreneurs, authors, Nobel laureates...Here is a glimpse of some of the recent distinguished visitors.

The Forest Canopy

14

Mymoon Moghul

I have witnessed many magical moments above the canopy during the golden hours of the morning...

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Heritage Centre**

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Explore the Heritage of IIT Madras

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Letter from the EDITOR

The docent training program conducted by Jyoti Ramesh has successfully been completed and certificates have been issued to the graduates. Some of the fresh docents are still fixing slots to do their rehearsals and final tours. A couple of them have completed their final tours and the rest have gone into hiding! Jokes apart, the program was a huge success and everyone appreciated Jyoti's approach to organizing the schedule in a structured and comprehensive manner.

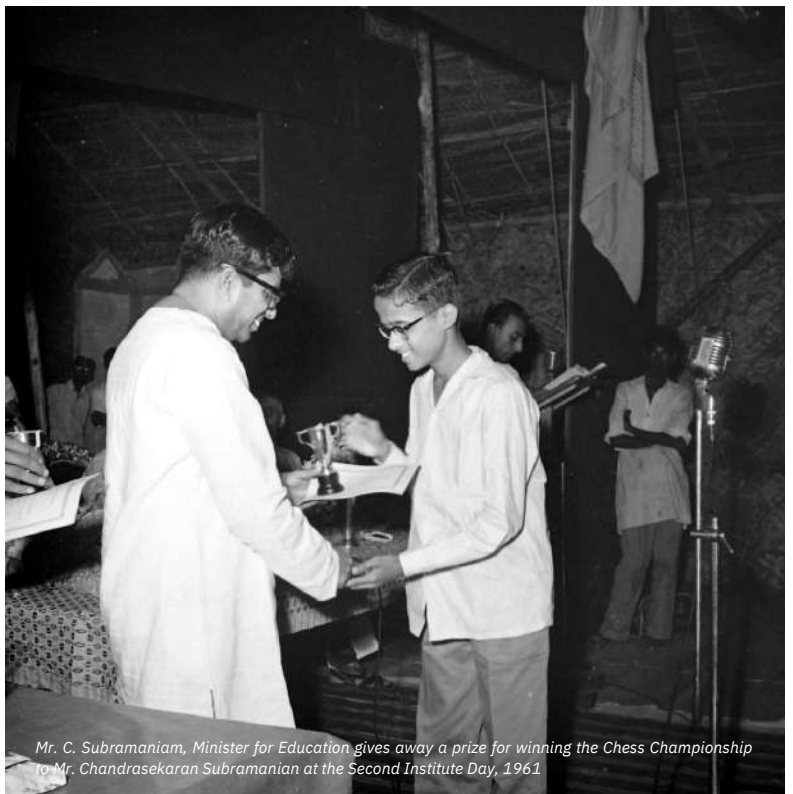
Apart from the program, we had several alumni reunions towards the end of December, one of which was the 1964 and 1965 batch reunions. The alumni from these batches were the very first (and second) batches of IIT Madras. During the reunion, alumni were invited to the Heritage Centre to sit in for some oral history interviews hosted by the Heritage Centre and a group of enthusiastic IIT Madras students.

Mr. Chandrasekaran Subramanian (1965 batch alumnus) helped us identify a student from a 4 April 1961 photograph! (check the photograph to the top-right) The picture, shot by Mr. C. Gourishankar during the Second Institute Day, captures two personalities, Mr. C. Subramanian and Mr. C. Subramanian! As you may have guessed, the student in the photograph is Mr. Chandrasekaran Subramanian himself! The image shows him receiving a prize for winning the chess championship from the Minister of Education for Madras State Mr. C. Subramanian. Interesting, is it not? Along with the reunions, chilly weather has also arrived at IIT Madras!

IITM has turned misty and scenic! The trees and street lights on campus combine with the mist to create a beautifully haunting look. Towards the end of December, members of the IITM community circulated warnings via WhatsApp statuses, advising people to avoid Manohar Watsa Stadium during the first few days of January 2025. The reason? New Year resolutions made by the IITM community were likely to result in hordes of enthusiastic runners and "fitness freaks" thronging the stadium and its whereabouts during the opening days of the fresh year. Food joints on campus are likely to suffer a dip in business in the first few days if this intel proves correct.

Enjoy your winter, at least what is left of it as you sift through the pages of this new issue of *Glass Panels*, and a Happy New Year to all our lovely readers!

-Bhuvanesh Santharam



Mr. C. Subramanian, Minister for Education gives away a prize for winning the Chess Championship to Mr. Chandrasekaran Subramanian at the Second Institute Day, 1961



Night walks in the cooler months are the best!



*Send us your
feedback!*



Raju Bhai

Raju keeps the Heritage Centre squeaky clean. He carries himself quietly and is always on time for his shift. He leaves as quietly as he comes. He was christened 'Raju Bhai' (refer Suriya's movie 'Anjaan') by Jabaraj, who enjoys Raju's company thoroughly. The back and forth between the two is a spectacle. Every time Jabaraj tries to make a joke at Raju's expense, Raju fires back with a nonchalant and fitting response. Raju Bhai is the antidote to Jabaraj's antics.

An Anecdotal Reference to Tree Planting at IIT Madras

as recollected by Prof. Y. Narayana Rao (Retd.), Electrical Engg. Dept., IIT Madras



Prof. Y. Narayana Rao
Retd. Professor
IIT Madras

It is common practice in IIT Madras that everyone who retires from their service is required to plant a tree to commemorate his / her service to the Campus. An entirely different occasion to plant a tree was a visit by dignitaries and VIP guests for certain events like the Convocation, VIP visit, or delivering Extramural Lectures. A plaque detailing the event and date was also being set up in front of the tree. It is quite another matter that this plaque's design drew some derogatory comments but it certainly provided some event details.

It was sometime during the 1980s, when Prof. Indiresan was the Director, that Prof. Dieter Kind, President of the Physikalisch Technische Bundesanstalt, (PTB) Braunschweig was invited to IIT Madras to deliver an Extramural Lecture (EML) at the CLT. The topic was something like "The Importance of Legal Metrology for a Country's Economic Growth" or something similar. He had been visiting the National Physical Laboratory (NPL) in New Delhi for the first time but had made 2-3 earlier visits to IIT Madras because of our close contacts with the Technical University of Braunschweig (TUB), where he had been a Professor before his taking charge as the President of PTB - a National-level post equivalent to that of a Union Minister in Germany. Though he was an Electrical Engineer, he had the distinction to hold that post for a period longer than most other earlier Presidents, who had all been Physicists.

Since I was his Doctoral Candidate in Germany and had been inducted to IIT Madras based on his suggestion in the Madras Committee to set up the High Voltage Laboratory in the Electrical Engineering Department of IIT Madras on the same lines as in TU Braunschweig, it was easy for me to convince him to accept our invitation. The EML was reasonably well attended by the students and faculty besides a few from the industry.

As was the custom in those days, speakers at the EML were requested to plant a tree on the campus near the SAC Building as a mark of remembrance of their visit to the campus, and Prof. Kind was no exception! He enjoyed doing it also and held this ceremonial act in great esteem. He proudly displayed it to all his guests in Germany and I recollect seeing the photos in his album years later during my visit to his residence in Braunschweig.

It was his tree planting on a special occasion that brought his son, Prof. Matthias Kind, and grandson, Mr. Johannes Kind, to search for the tree during their visit to IIT Madras in January 2025. Prof Matthias Kind is a retired Chemical Engineering Professor from the Technical University of Karlsruhe, where his son is a doctoral candidate in the Thermal Sciences Department. The latter was presenting his doctoral work at an



Johannes and Matthias Kind at the spot where Prof. Dieter Kind planted a tree

International Conference held at IIT Madras and his father had joined him in planning a tour of South India, with which he was familiar from his internship days in Bombay (now Mumbai). The father and son combination had seen the photos of the tree and were very keen to visit it and record its growth over the last 40-45 years!

However, when they inquired at the Heritage Centre about the tree, no one could recall its location or any related details. Unfazed, they searched for any connection that could link them, their father, and grandfather to IIT Madras. That's when Prof. Matthias remembered that his father, Prof. Dieter Kind, had co-authored a book with someone named Rao from the Electrical Engineering Department of IIT Madras. Upon suggesting names like Prof. Venkat Rao and Prof. Narayana Rao, they immediately recognized my name and remembered my visit to their home in Braunschweig.

From there on, it was smooth sailing! The Heritage Centre, with which I had been recently in contact, lost no time in putting the two of us together on phone and we had an initial 10-minute conversation exchanging pleasantries about their visit to IIT Madras and mutual German contacts. I also told them about the exact location of the tree in front of SAC, where it had been planted. But when they went there, trees were found in plenty but some of the plaques were missing. The exact tree could not be identified! That is also then when I came to know of their plans to visit Mysuru and Sravanabelagola in Karnataka, before proceeding

to Kerala and returning to Germany next week, when Johannes Kind was required to defend his doctoral thesis!

It was all worked out and two days later, we could meet in our house in Mysuru over a cup of coffee and reminisce about matters of mutual interest. That their nice trip ended with a photo session should be obvious as per the photo attached.

But that is not the end of this anecdotal reference!

Following the discussions we had, it came to my mind that Prof. Dieter Kind had been offered an honorarium for the Extramural Lecture, which he vehemently declined to accept! Instead, he offered to donate that amount to institute a prize in his name for any student project in High Voltage Engineering submitted for the B. Tech. degree in Electrical Engineering. If my memory serves me right, this was also approved by the Senate and the prize was offered only once or twice. It was later discontinued since there were no more student projects in that particular area competing for this prize. The Institute also wrote to Prof. Dieter Kind to enhance the deposit amount as it was insufficient to present the prize in its earlier size and format. In a final letter sent to the IIT Madras, Prof. Kind suggested that the amount be surrendered to the Institute. A copy of his letter to this effect was with me till very recently, but I am unable to locate it now!

I do not remember what was IITM's final decision on this matter. Only some research through the Senate Papers may reveal the final result.



A portrait of Prof. Dieter Kind (Source: Prof. Matthias Kind)



My wife Mrs. Vijaya N. Rao, Prof. Matthias Kind, Mr. Johannes Kind and myself in Mysuru at my residence

Memoirs of Ragging



Hiranya Kumar Panigrahi
B. Tech in Metallurgy, 1970
IIT Madras

Nearly six decades later, the memories of ragging at the beginning of my IIT Madras days in 1964 remain rather pleasant.

My first impression of IIT Madras was positive. The large campus area, the woods, and the wildlife provided an attractive alternative to the rigors of workshop training and academic classes. It offered an escape from the routine of academic courses and workshop training.

Godavari Hostel was brand new, and our 1964 batch was the first to occupy it. The front entrance of the hostel faced the road where several institute buses ran at regular intervals. For the construction, the trees around the hostel were removed. Across the road from the hostel, there was an open space where deer visited frequently.

Ganga Hostel and Jamuna Hostel were under construction at the time and were later occupied by the 1965 and 1966 batches.

The academic classes and workshop training consumed most of our time. We met in the mess during breakfast and evening meals. There was little time for discussions at breakfast, as we were all busy getting ready for classes or workshop training. There was more time for discussions during the evening meals and in the common rooms. Soon, we got to know our batchmates and engineering branchmates.

Most of the academic classes were held in the Humanities & Sciences Block (HSB), while the large hall of the Central Lecture Theatre (CLT) was used for common lectures for the entire batch. There was also a grand piano under the staircase of the CLT.

We normally moved in groups, as word had spread that seniors sometimes ragged the freshers. Many of us were learning about ragging for the first time. Ragging was a way for seniors to get to know the fresh students, or "freshers," as they liked to call us. Ragging was a mild exercise where seniors asked tricky questions to pull our leg.

The news of ragging instilled fear in us. The fear of ragging brought us all closer. Most of us lived under the protective umbrella of Godavari Hostel, with the enthusiastic support of the hostel warden. The collapsible gates at the entrance were closed in the evenings to prevent any seniors from entering the hostel. However, this didn't stop the seniors from entering during the day. They were smart enough to outwit the warden or any faculty member they encountered.

We moved in groups, especially when going to the classrooms in the Humanities & Sciences Block, avoiding any contact with seniors. I quickly learned a few tricks. One way to escape was to avoid contact with the seniors. Avoiding eye contact was also important, as the eyes have a way of communicating. I also remained inconspicuous and wasn't eager to get to know the seniors.



1960s - A view of hostels from the water tower. Photograph contributed by Mr. Laxmipathy (1968 alumnus)

For the freshers living in the ground-floor rooms of Godavari Hostel, there was more danger of ragging in store. The windows provided easy access for seniors to reach us.

Unfortunately, my room was on the ground floor. Word soon spread about the ragging of freshers in the ground-floor rooms, and something had to be done. I decided to close the windows of my room, which were accessible from outside. It was quite hot, and closing the windows made the room even hotter, as there was no breeze. But the fear of ragging made me accept the discomfort of sweating in a closed room.

Even with the windows closed, I would receive calls from seniors asking me to open the window. However, I didn't respond. Since there was no way for a senior to know whether anyone was in the room after the windows were closed, they soon gave up and looked for other targets. I managed to escape through the ground-floor windows.

Against this backdrop of fear, one holiday gave us a chance to visit Madras city. A Hindi movie, *Sangam*, was running in a cinema hall on Mount Road (now Anna Salai). We were eager to see the movie, but the queue at the ticket counter was long. I was desperate to see the movie, but the length of the queue made it seem unlikely that I would get a ticket. Suddenly, an idea flashed in my mind: the concept of ragging might work to

get a ticket!

I spotted a fresher from our batch near the booking window in the queue. Some eager batchmates were asking him to buy an extra ticket for the movie, but he was refusing. This guy didn't mix much with us in the hostel, and I was sure he didn't know me. But I knew he was a fresher.

I approached him and demanded, "Fresher?"

"Yes... Yes, Sir," he replied meekly.

"Get a ticket for me," I said, assuming the authority of a senior.

The trick worked. I got a ticket and saw the movie. The guy didn't even ask for money. I paid him later.

The next morning, in the hostel dining hall, the guy was sitting at the same table as me! I meekly apologized for assuming the role of a senior and thanked him for buying the ticket.

The experience of ragging had helped me make some friends, and fortunately, no enemies.



1960s - A view of the campus from the water tower. Photograph contributed by Mr. Laxmipathy (1968 alumnus)

Dam(n) the River!

The 24th River of IIT Madras



Bhuvanesh Santharam
Senior Content Writer
Heritage Centre

On 15 April 1966, “Gem” wrote in *Campastimes* “Yet another river has been added to the road map of our Institute.” Gem was referring to the inauguration of Alakananda Hostel which was “inaugurated by the Governor of Madras, Sardar Ujjal Singh”. Recently, a tributary of one of the 23 ‘rivers’ of IIT Madras found its way into the Heritage Centre.

This river comes alive mostly during the rainy season, with it, a fragrance. Sushma, who sits closest to the riverbank, experiences the brunt of the aroma. It sends her shooting across the staff room pinching her nose in agony, while the rest of us cackle over her athletic proceedings. It takes just a few seconds for the incense to spread across the staff room, following which, the rest of us are forced to vacate the premises until Raju Bhai, our trusty housekeeping staff, comes to the rescue.

We have notified the concerned authorities regarding the river but to no avail. Several persons have come and looked at it as if it were a tourist spot like the Ganga or the backwaters of Kerala. The river, despite dedicated efforts, continues to flow on and off. Soon, we may have to offer boat rides in addition to our golf cart campus tours and regular Heritage Centre tours!

The source of this water, a small spring under the tiles (or wall?), originates from a sump behind the wall (outside the Heritage Centre). This fact was pointed out to us numerous times by the persons we called to solve the problem. We already knew why it was happening, we just needed to know how to prevent the river from flowing into our staff room! To add to our woes, the AC in the ‘81 Theatre began leaking. We had already ‘fixed’ it several times, but it insisted on leaking and dampening the floor. In addition, the Heritage Centre’s entrance turns into Niagara Falls during heavy rains, with a generous amount of water crawling in from under the gap of the automatic door providing a water-park experience to visitors. If such aquatic atrocities were to continue, the Heritage Centre would either turn into an aquarium or an underwater museum!

It could hardly qualify as an aquarium if it turned into one. We have one Red-bellied piranha from Venezuela which is dead. By dead, I mean it was presented to us in that form by an alumnus. I am sure a single departed piranha would not suffice to give us the title of an ‘aquarium’ unless you would like to count Jabaraj as a dugong. If it were to turn into an underwater museum, we would all be floating about like scuba divers trying to put the posters back into place. A model of a ship presented by the University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka, would be merrily floating on the surface, while the rest of us would be submerged.

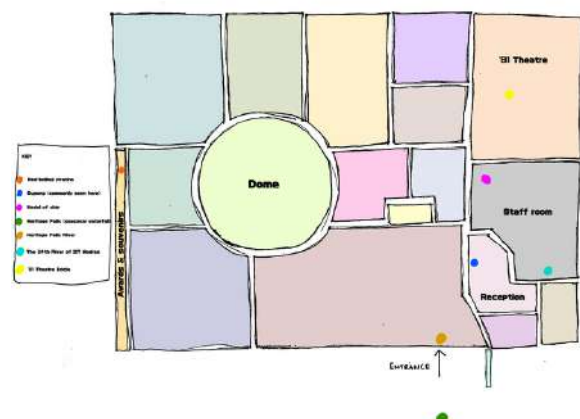


Looking at the brighter side of things, if the Centre were to get fully submerged, the mould above the Sengupto portrait, near the entrance would probably be cleared, and so would the mushrooms. But that is a story for another day.

The water issue has been ‘fixed’ for now, but let us wait and see! If the river persists and we are unable to prevent its ebb and flow, we must think of a name for it. I already have one in mind. It starts with a ‘C’ and ends with an ‘M’. Any guesses?

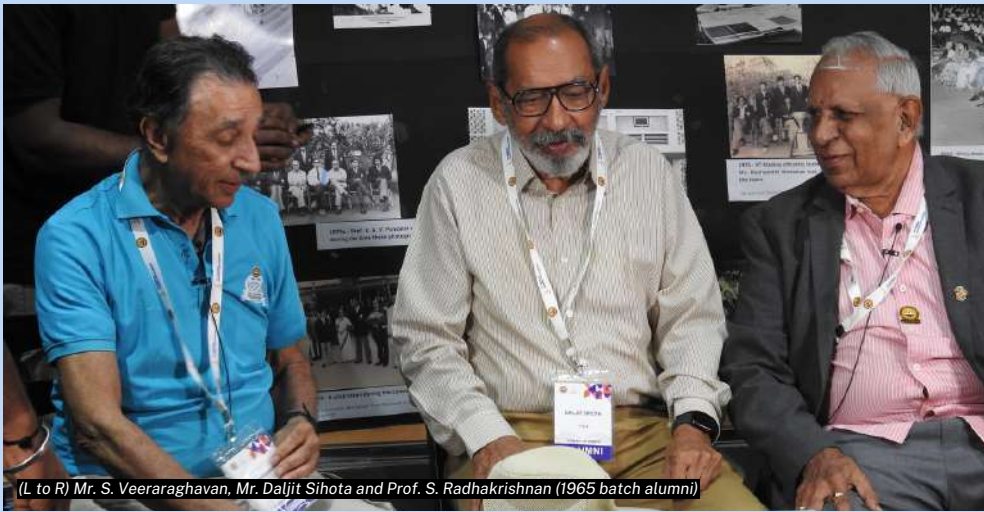
It is a shame we could not get the Governor to take a look at the aquatic landmark inside the Centre!

Heritage Centre Aquatic Map (Unofficial)



DIAMOND JUBILEE REUNION

DECEMBER 2024



(L to R) Mr. S. Veeraraghavan, Mr. Daljit Sihota and Prof. S. Radhakrishnan (1965 batch alumni)



(L to R) Mr. Ganesh Rajagopal and Mr. B. S. Sudhir Chandra, alumni from the 1964 batch



Mr. S. Veeraraghavan, Mr. Daljit Sihota and Prof. S. Radhakrishnan (1965 batch alumni) with Ms. Aishani Pattnaik (Mechanical Engineering, 2022-26 batch)



Mr. B. S. Sudhir Chandra (1964 batch alumnus)

The Heritage Centre had the honor of hosting the first-ever Diamond Jubilee reunion in December 2024, bringing together alumni from the 1964 and 1965 batches.



(L to R) Prof. S. Radhakrishnan, Mr. Chimanlal Chawda, Mr. S. Veeraraghavan, and Mr. Daljit Sihota with Mr. Kumaran Sathasivam



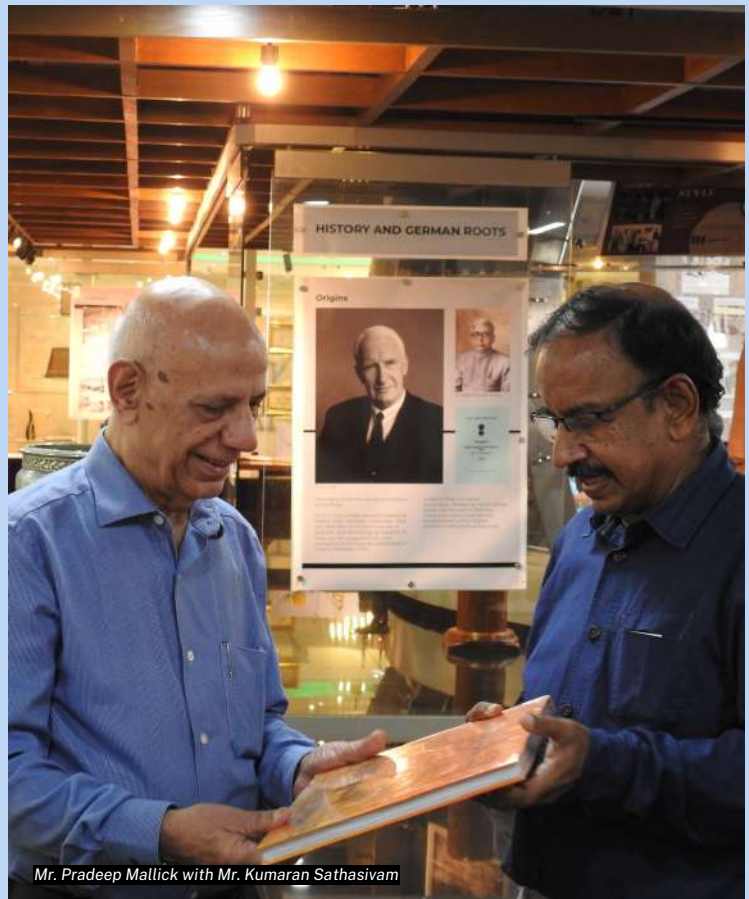
(L to R) Mr. V. S. Mani, Mr. E. S. Bhagiratha Rao, Mrs. Githa Thangavelu, Mr. S. R. Thangavelu, Dr. Bhamy Shenoy, Mrs. Suman Shenoy, Ms. Diya Mariam Satheesh and Ms. Mamata Dash



Dr. Bhamy Shenoy (1965 batch alumnus) and Mr. S. R. Thangavelu (1964 batch alumnus)



Ms. Mamata Dash with Mr. V. S. Mani



Mr. Pradeep Mallick with Mr. Kumaran Sathasivam



Mr. Pradeep Mallick



Mr. Chandrasekaran Subramanian



(L to R) Mr. Premnath Bhaskaran, Mr. V. S. Mani and Mr. Chandrasekaran Subramanian



Dr. Bhagy Shenoy and Mrs. Suman Shenoy



(L to R) Ms. Mamata Dash, Mr. Ganesh Rajagopal, Mr. B. S. Sudhir Chandra and Prof. Radhakrishnan Swaminathan and Mr. Chimanlal Chawda



Mr. Pritam Lal Kapur (1965 batch alumnus)



(L to R) Mr. Vishnu Sahai Srivastava, Mr. Chimanlal Chawda, Mr. B. S. Sudhir Chandra and Mr. Ganesh Rajagopal

The Heritage Square



How many IIT Madras-related words can you find in this puzzle?

Words can go in any direction.

Words can share letters as they cross over each other.

The person who finds the most words will win 5 IIT Madras-themed postcards and a bookmark!

Come to the Heritage Centre and show us your findings.

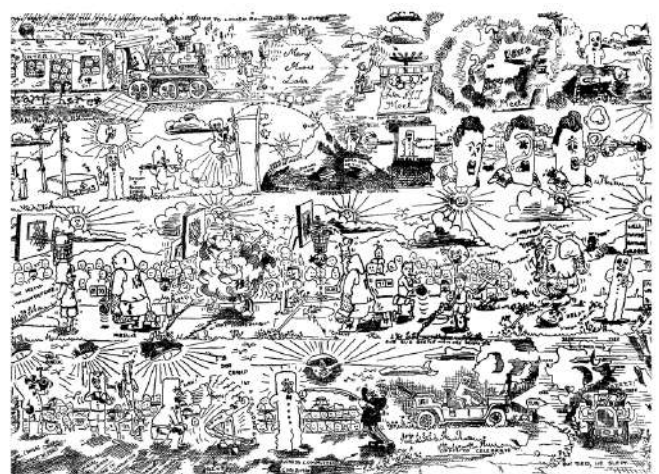
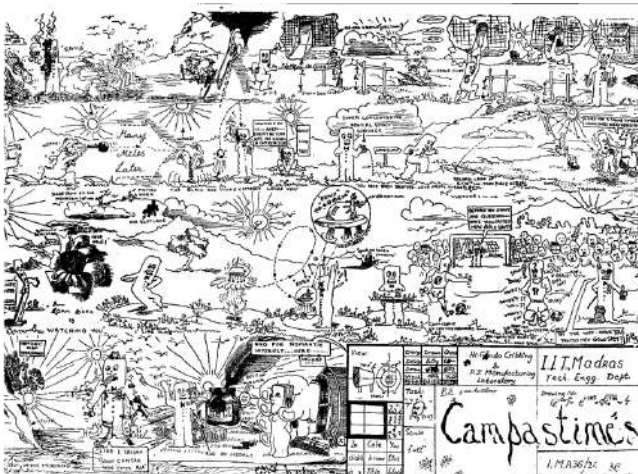
Winners and answers will be published in the next issue.

You have till the end of April to send in your entries!

Email us the answers at ic35226@iitmad.ac.in

FROM THE ARCHIVES...

Campastimes 1 January 1976



WINTER FEST DELHI

— R. A. Jeeva

Like most interesting things, it started off with a whimper. Ompa cornered me one day and said, "Hey, wanna go to Delhi?" I mused on the possibility that Ompa had finally made it round the bend, and guardedly made a noncommittal reply. He gave me the details—Winter Festivals at Miranda, Hindu College and St. Stephen's. Of course this was putting it in a different light, and I agreed with alacrity.

Thus in a couple of days' time Joe and I were ensconced some two hours in a GT compartment. When we landed up at New Delhi, we spied a couple of harassed-looking females walking up and down the platform peering into the compartments. Evidently the Miranda House reception committee. So like man, we sauntered up like casually and announce that we are the IITM contingent.

And immediately came the first faux pas of the tour: Rajiv, with elaborate casualness, introduces Joe: "This is Rajiv and I'm Joe". It helped break the ice, though. And we reached Miranda House just in time to be disqualified for the Quiz.

We were shunted into Hindu College Hostel, (boasting certain fond hopes) and it proved a kere-tan task getting into Miranda thereafter. Grub, though, was good. (IIT hostel note: they have subsidised grub, mess bills Rs. 120/-)

Shanker and Medi arrived next day; Debjani was already there. We had some moderate success in Miranda—Joe's collage got a prize. Shanker bagged one for the debate. The scene stealer was, however, MCC, with their superb singers.

In another day the Miranda Fest was over. One sortie regretted being ejected from there especially after a fine farewell dinner and a hot jam session. Nice dames, though maybe a trifle overdressed for my simple Southie tastes.

Meanwhile the second blunder of the day—a nondescript female came up to Rajiv and asked him

where he was from, what his name was, etc., and an unexpected bombshell: "What's your caste?" Rajiv was zapped for a moment, then drew himself up to full height and answered solemnly, "I don't believe in religion and caste". He thought it was a pretty good reply till Debjani pointed out that the question had been, "What's your class?"

The Hindu College binge was so—see. Chap called Sanjay Srivastava was impressive. Not to Just-A-Minute: Mahesh would have torn it to pieces. The IITB crowd did well and IIM Cal were fantastic at Quiz. Manglik, Debbie and Brangi put off a good play.

Then came the climax; the much-publicised St. Stephen's and its Winterfest. IITM, dark horses, pulled off a major surprise in the Ski-cum mime—Bhaskar and Joe of their scintillating host in 'Butcher of Barcelona'. The audience reaction was just what it should have been. They laughed in the right places, maintained an audible silence otherwise and gave the youngsters a well-deserved standing ovation. The judges were overwhelmed and confessed their inexperience to judge such variety of art 'comprising all the elements of drama'. Good show there, Joe and Bhaskar! (Joe was christened 'Butcher', especially by enthusiastic females).

Later Joe collected a prize for painting. Modi got a very honourable mention (against very stiff competition) in the debate, and Rajiv and Manglik made a brave attempt in the Quiz. All told, we tied with IIT KGP for the Best Participating College Prize. But KGP cashed it because of more 'honourable mentions'. Generally, Kudos to the IITM team, especially Joe and Bhaskar. The Stephens' Soap-Box, Debate and Eloquence were good items.

The last day's highlight was a combined Madras show from MCC and IITM. The curtain fell, and to the strains of 'Stephens and its Winterfest ..', (remember 'IIT and Madras...?') the long trek back home began.

MUSKIE MUDHAR WAGLE is another one of those brilliant youngsters who has terminated his school life, so here we drastically expose him to the public eye.

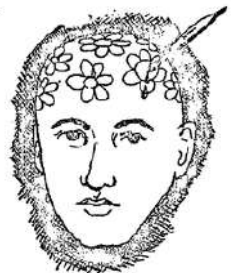
Wagle, Allah to his comrades, is the Fine Arts Sen and he is responsible for the sketching, collaging, and clay modelling competitions and also the art exhibitions. With his dusty band of helpers Big Chief has designed all those zipping T-shirts, along with, collared and (ign the lucky ones) photos. If these sequences of Hindi Gas bring back pleasant memories in the days to come, Wagle and the organisers of the festival will feel that their time was well spent.

PERSONALITY:

Campastimes 29 January 1976

CAUTION

This paper has been treated with a preservative chemical while printing. Please wash hands with soap and water if you hold for more than 10 minutes -- In other words circulate this you clod.



Campastimes 1 January 1976

Visitors to the Centre

Distinguished Visitors to the Heritage Centre



Diya Mariam Satheesh
Project Associate
Heritage Centre

It is always a pleasure and honour to host important personalities at the Heritage Centre. Ministers, entrepreneurs, authors, Nobel laureates...the Centre is never short of stories of dignitaries gracing it. The past, present and future of the Institute are documented and kept on display here, making it a significant part of any visitor's itinerary. Here is a glimpse of some of the recent distinguished visitors.



IIT Heritage Centre well conceived idea broadcasts the origin and growth of IIT. Staff members are courteous and warm. Great experience at theatre.

Dr. N. Venkatachalam
Commissioner, Tamil Nadu Archives
05 November 2024

Thanks to the team for the curated trail and excellent warm and welcoming gesture. An important archival and heritage documentation which other institutions can follow too. Thank you.

Thirupurasundari Sevel
Architect planner - Author -Story teller - Historian - Curator
20 November 2024



Great learning experience. The team led by Mamata madam is very passionate and inspiring.

Rishi Raj, IAS
20 November 2024

Thanks for the introduction. Very impressive.

Chien Yu- Hsiung
WEC Superabrasives, Taiwan
27 November 2024





Thank you for the invitation. I look forward to working together.

Dr. Luc Verburgh
Chief Academic Officer at Higher Colleges of Technology, UAE
02 December 2024

Very good university

Jan, Chyan-Deng
National Cheng Kung University, Taiwan
02 December 2024



National Security Advisory Board (NSAB)
04 December 2024

*Very nicely done Heritage Centre.
Great place for students and visitors.*

Amitabh Sinha
Deputy Editor, The Indian Express
09 December 2024



I graduated 40 years ago almost to the day! Thanks for the incredible hospitality and the great memories.

Prof. Srinivas Devadas
Distinguished Alumnus Awardee (DAA) 2019
Professor, Edwin Sibley Webster
Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)
20 December 2024



*Thank you for the incredible hospitality and kindness!
Wonderful to be back.*

Prof. Vinod Vaikuntanathan
Distinguished Alumnus Awardee (DAA) 2024
Professor, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)
Co-Founder and Chief Cryptographer, Duality Technologies Inc.
20 December 2024



The Forest Canopy

a biodiversity hotspot, microclimate regulator, and carbon sink



*Dr. Mymoon Moghul
Former IIT Madras Campus Resident, Alumna of Kendriya Vidyalaya IIT Chennai*

A forest canopy, sometimes known as the last biotic frontier, is the uppermost layer of a forest. It forms when the branches and leaves of trees become interconnected. In this sense, the forest canopy serves as a "roof" for the rest of the forest ecosystem. It plays an essential role in regulating the microclimate and providing habitat for myriad wildlife and epiphytes. The canopy determines how much sunlight reaches the forest floor, influencing humidity and temperature levels, which directly affect the growth of plants beneath it. The large leaf surface area of the canopy allows it to capture carbon dioxide from the atmosphere through photosynthesis.

The structure of a forest canopy can be divided into three distinct layers: the emergent layer, the mid-canopy, and the understory. The emergent layer comprises the tallest trees that rise above the main canopy, known as emergents. The mid-canopy, the primary layer, contains the bulk of the foliage, while the understory is the vegetation layer, typically made up of smaller trees and shrubs, that sits below the canopy, where sunlight is limited. When the canopy foliage decomposes, it contributes to the formation of canopy soil, which is rich in nutrients. This soil supports a variety of invertebrates and microbes.

The canopy structure is influenced by the tree species, the age, and the health of the forest. Each tree species has a unique branching pattern and leaf size. Factors such as deforestation, cutting, or disease can directly affect the canopy's structure.



The IITM campus spans over 600 acres and is part of a Tropical Dry Evergreen Forest. A canopy is located along the southern boundary, between the basketball court and the hockey ground. From my rooftop, it appears to be a large blob of more than a dozen shades of green. The colors are muted, and the sounds are muffled, except when the birds' songs erupt during the early hours of the morning. The orchestra is led by the magpie robin and interspersed with the sweet notes of the white-browed bulbuls and the screech of the rose-ringed parakeets that dash through the morning skies. Rising above this blob are the majestic palmyras. This canopy consists of many native wild species of trees, shrubs, creepers, and microflora.

Some of the trees found here include the silver date palm, palmyra, neem, banyan, Indian cork tree, bullet wood, Indian coral tree, wood apple, prosopis juliflora, Madras Asoka tree, jamun, pipal, strangler fig tree, cluster fig tree, tamarind, Indian jujube, wild lime, sandpaper tree, and paalai. The forest is also home to mammals such as the spotted deer, mongoose, jackal, striped squirrel, and civet cat, and serves as a haven for many species of birds, butterflies, moths, and other invertebrates.



Black-rumped flameback



Three-striped palm squirrel



White-throated kingfisher



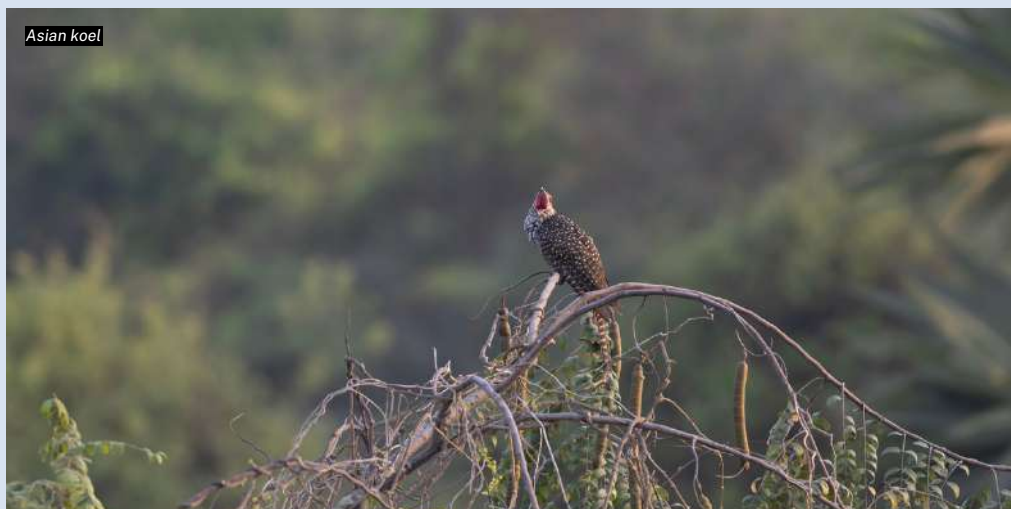
Black-rumped flameback



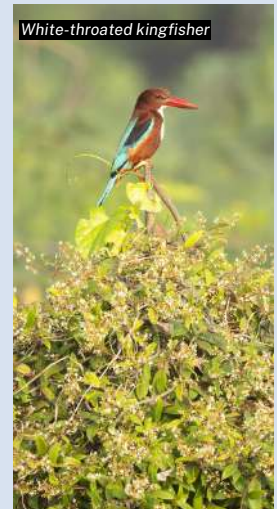
Coucal



Paradise flycatcher



Asian koel



Some of the birds commonly seen here are the magpie robin, black-headed bulbul, rufous treepie, white-breasted waterhen, lesser flameback woodpecker, yellow-billed babblers, purple-backed sunbird, white-browed bulbul, coucal, cuckoo, tailorbird, mynah, common crow, large-billed crow, coppersmith barbet, and shikra. These birds can be heard in the mornings and sometimes in the evenings. They can be seen on the treetops, some at the mid-canopy level, while a few forage on the forest floor at the edge of the canopy.

The migrants and seasonal visitors that can be seen or heard in this canopy include frogs, toads, and birds such as the golden oriole, orange-headed thrush, paradise flycatcher, grey hornbill, open-billed stork, Indian pitta, little egret, pond heron, and forest wagtail. Many birds, such as palm swifts, blue-tailed bee-eaters, black kite, little cormorant, Indian darter, glossy ibis, rosy starlings, booted eagle, honey buzzard, and purple heron, fly by using the canopy as a safe passage or as a feeding ground.



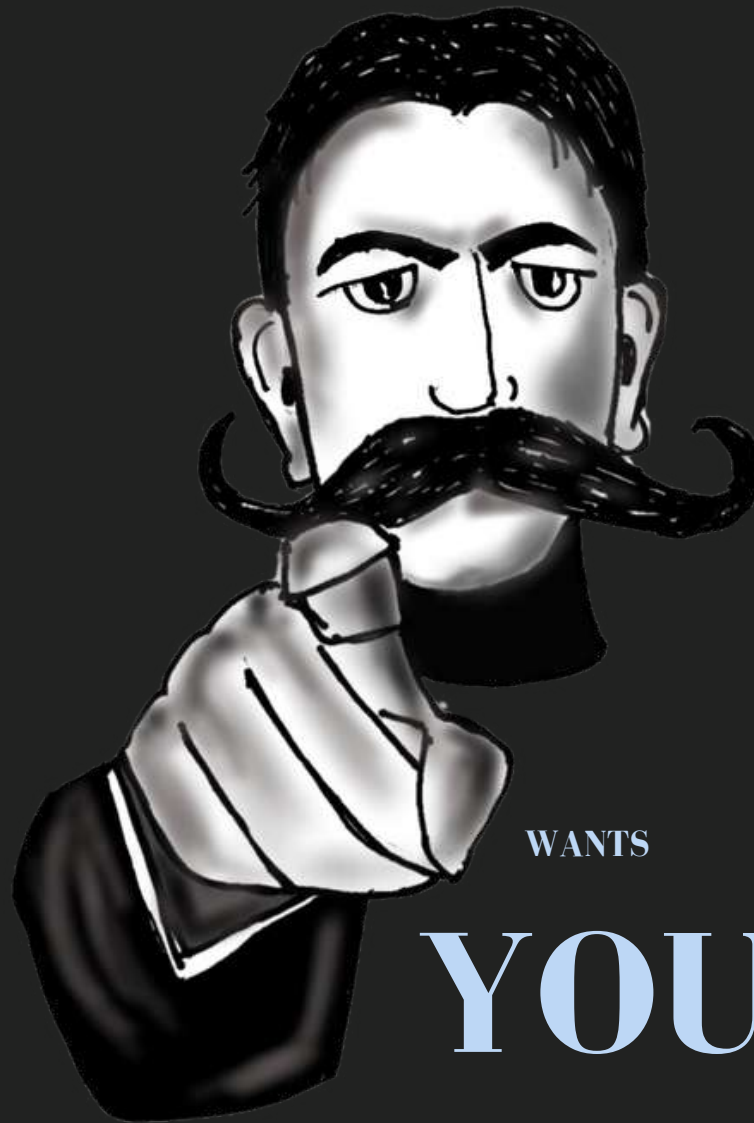
Jungle babbler



Rose-ringed parakeets

I have witnessed many magical moments above the canopy during the golden hours of the morning and evening, and when the mist hangs heavy on the treetops. I believe that planting new trees, mostly exotic species, and destroying the forest cover that has developed over scores of years is harmful to the environment and biodiversity. In the words of Nalini Nadkarni, “Beyond just their ecological value, forests touch a wide spectrum of other crucial values, be it aesthetic, economic, or spiritual ones.

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