

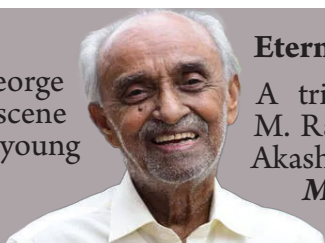


"Girl Friends poignantly illuminates the delicate tapestry of identity, love, and friendship."
- Shobhana Padinjattillil



Sportify

In a cricket and football-dominated state, George Arogyam is transforming Kerala's sports scene with his passion for rugby. From coaching young talent to inspiring grassroots movements.
Read more on Page 9



Eternal Legacy

A tribute to Kerala's golden Voice. M. Ramachandran, the iconic voice of Akashvani, passed away at 91.
More on Page 3

New Gateway @ CAMPUS

Geethna Kalesh & Aromal Dev J B

The main gate of Karyavattom campus of University of Kerala is getting a face lift as the redesigned main gate will feature an architectural style inspired by the University of Kerala Palayam gate. Additionally, the historic 70-year-old inaugural stone laid by Dr. S Radhakrishnan, former President of India, will be placed at the new entrance, blending tradition with modernity.

Planned improvements include expanding the road width from 4 meters to 6.6 meters, which will significantly improve traffic flow, particularly during peak hours. To facilitate easy access, two pedestrian side gates will also be built.

Infrastructure enhancements include underground cabling and a trench system to streamline utilities, while advanced CCTV cameras will reinforce campus security. Three new security posts with two at both sides and one in the center are set to be constructed at the gate, and the existing post will be relocated to the back gate. Though initial demolition has commenced, some administrative delays have slowed the project's progress. This large-scale project is backed by a budget of around Rs 70 lakhs, with an estimated overall cost of Rs 1 crore.

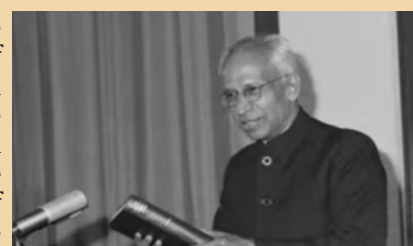
gate closure has led to disruptions for students and faculty, who must now adjust to modified routes and extended walking distances. Buses that previously stopped at the main gate are now rerouted to terminate at the back gate, creating additional challenges. Alternate routes, such as the back gate and a path near the Indian Coffee House, are available for access.

"As the work is about the main gate of the campus, it's going to be prestigious happening in Karyavattom campus because the entrance is the face of the campus" Sri Manoj (Assistant Engineer) who supervises the work added. Assistant Engineer Divya who co-supervises the work said, the construction aims to modernise the gate with enhanced security, accessibility, and aesthetic appeal.

Despite minor delays and temporary inconveniences, the project team is dedicated to adhering to the 240-day schedule, with the goal of unveiling a more secure, efficient main entrance. Once completed, the new gate will not only improve campus accessibility but also enhance the institution's overall image, symbolising a blend of tradition and progress.

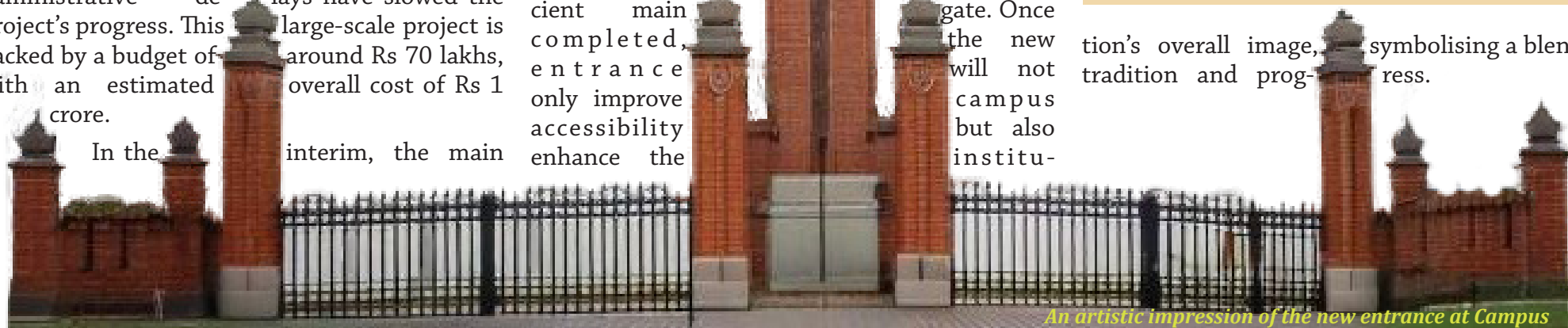
A HISTORICAL MILESTONE

The foundation stone of Karyavattom Campus of University of Kerala was laid by the 2nd President of India Dr. S. Radhakrishnan in 1963. The function was presided over by the then Vice Chancellor of University of Kerala Prof. Samuel Mathai.



Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, former President speaking at the Silver Jubilee of the Kerala University in 1963

It was a proud moment for one of the prestigious Universities of the country to hear a scholastic speech from a stalwart of higher Education like Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, who was also the chairman of the University Education Committee of the Nation. University of Kerala, the then University of Travancore, grew under the ethos he championed, focusing on liberal arts, philosophy and an emphasis on educational ethics. The foundation stone that was preserved by Kerala University for the last 7 decades will now adorn the new gate which will inspire the next generations, showcasing the rich history of the University.



An artistic impression of the new entrance at Campus

Stem Cells, A Lantern of Hope

Muhsina N B

University of Kerala's Kariavattom campus is taking an ardent initiative in healthcare by inaugurating their new Advanced Centre for Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research (AcREM) by Pinarayi Vijayan, Chief Minister of Kerala on October 23.

Regenerative medicine (RM) is an emerging field utilising stem cells, bio-materials, and bio-active molecules to repair, replace damaged tissues. Focusing on cutaneous biology where stem cells can be used in skin-related degenerative con-



Advanced Centre for Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research in Cutaneous Biology at Kerala University's Karyavattom campus.

ditions as a cure by regenerating skin and hair developing personalised cure for the patients.

Dr Sreejith P, Director of AcREM, and Assistant Professor of Zoology Department secured funds to the tune of 4.4

Crore under the scheme for Performance Linked Encouragement for Academic Studies and Endeavor.

Research on RM is going on world over in the use of stem cells to develop simple to complex

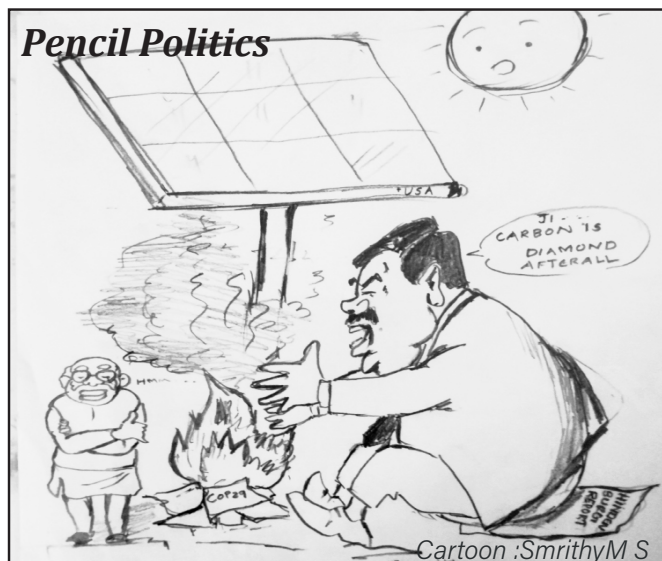
organs that can be transplanted to the human body aimed at treating degenerative conditions such as skin diseases like systemic sclerosis, systemic lupus erythematosus, and chronic diseases like diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and neurodegenerative disorders.

Other initiatives of the centre include the establishment of a state-of-the-art 3D bioprinting laboratory for tissue engineering.

It will integrate omics-based methodologies (used to characterise stem cells and study their biological responses to bio-materials) for ear-

ly bio-marker discovery, mRNA vaccine development, and AI-driven diagnostic tools. Biorepositories for human tissues and blood samples

will also be established, alongside comprehensive training programs for students, scientists, and healthcare professionals.



Cartoon :SmrithyM S



Editorials are Editorials. They are supposed to have an opinion, even a very strong one.
- Gene Weingarten

"We have to uphold a free press and freedom of speech - because in the end, lies and misinformation are no match for the truth"

Barack Obama

2

KU on the RUN!

University of Kerala was never on losing race to begin with, as many believe. This state Public University is racing ahead in the Quality scale of higher education, making enormous strides in domestic and global rankings. In the latest National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) rankings, it secured the 9th position among State Public Universities, outpacing other state institutions. Nationally, Kerala University also jumped from 47th to 38th overall. Doubling its A⁺⁺ NAAC accreditation misses the mark, as the university excels on multiple fronts. With distinguished faculty and exceptionally bright students known for their passion, political engagement, and innovation, the institution truly deserves its top-tier status. It is one of the first 16 institutions in India, established in 1937 as the University of Travancore in the former princely state. With Sir C. P. Ramaswamy Iyer serving as its first Vice-Chancellor, the university was founded by Maharajah Sri Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma and took inspiration from UK establishments while creating its own affiliating system. Kerala University secured the 339th position in the QS World University Rankings for Asia in 2025. Located on a sprawling 359-acre main campus in Kariavattom and with its Senate House campus in Palayam, Thiruvananthapuram, the university stands out for its extensive reach, affiliating with over 150 colleges across Kerala. Kerala University hosts 11 schools and 44 departments, offering more than 30 undergraduate and postgraduate programs.

Kerala University's drive to cutting-edge research, bolstered by modern amenities like the new Centre for Regenerative Medicine and the Central Laboratory for Instrumentation and Facilitation (CLIF) at Kariavattom, is what is driving the University's explosive growth. The Government of India acknowledged KU as a high-achieving university, and from 2011 to 2016, it was awarded substantial funding under the Promotion of University Research and Scientific Excellence (PURSE) program. This made it possible to build CLIF, a cutting-edge facility that centralizes advanced analytical tools to improve research output. KU's laboratories are currently at the forefront of contemporary science and technology, thanks to additional assistance from the Kerala Infrastructure Investment Fund Board.

The Kerala University Library, established in 1942 near the University Senate Hall in Thiruvananthapuram, is Kerala's oldest and largest university library. It houses over 3,50,000 books, 500 subscriptions, and special collections on Kerala and Women's Studies, along with digital services like UGC Infonet. With support from Kerala's Higher Education Ministry, KUL has added facilities like the E.M.S. Namboodiripad auditorium and the Translational Research and Innovation Centre. Rare collections are being digitized to enhance accessibility. The University also offers affordable hostel facilities, including six student hostels and an International Youth Hostel, with two new hostels inaugurated recently.

KU may have achieved rapid gains, but it's a long run. Sustaining progress will require continued modernization, expansion of partnerships, and focus on quality. In the marathon of global academia, KU shows no sign of slowing down.

Is AI Threatening IT Jobs ?

Madhavan Panicker



Sayu Sekhar

Associate Vice President and one of the founding members at Agiliad Technologies Private Limited, Pune

With the proliferation in use of AI based tools in all walks of life, there is a growing fear of it replacing humans in their professions. The one sector which is speculated to be most threatened is that of Information Technology (IT). Is that the case?

We spoke to a Senior IT professional Mr Sayu Sekhar who is the Associate Vice President and one of the founding members at Agiliad Technologies Private Limited which is a Pune based company which specialises in IT related engineering, R&D Services with global clients, about the penetration of AI into his field of specialisation. With over 23 years of experience, In his current disposition Sayu has a full plate, be it interacting with prospective clients, directing technical teams, setting up new ventures, recruiting new professionals or planning the future of the business.

AI is currently being

used as an automation tool to help with repetitive/ generic work, creating small sections of code etc, it is still at a very nascent stage of development. Though it may not seem so, but, providing a solution for meeting a client's IT needs involves a great deal of creativity. AI based tools lack creativity as they cannot visualise anything independent of their knowledge base. They are as good as the previous research or knowledge base they are privy to.

At its present capabilities, an AI based tool can be used efficiently for certain jobs. Quality Control, AI based tools and scanners are excellent in detecting

common errors. They can be used as a good diagnostic tool in medical scanning devices. They can also be used in this role on production lines. They are however severely limited in their ability in detecting new errors. Repetitive coding, they can be used for generating generic codes or snippet codes for argumentative tasks related to the original string. They are good at reproducing an earlier solution with dictated changes and hence are efficient at rendering proof of concept models for similar client requirements. Handling data, AI tools are good at handling large volumes of data and making sense of it. Natural language processing, AI can understand, interpret and reproduce data in human language which serves its application in handling customer requests, translations and voice activated assistance.

AI helps in research and analysis because of its ability to analyse patterns, predict outcomes and make adjustments.

The ability of AI at

present is limited to being an assistant which requires constant supervision. In the hands of an experienced IT professional it could help multiply his capabilities. However its ability in independent jobs is severely limited. AI can generate biased code as they learn only from the data they are trained on. AI tools do not understand the context and intent behind the code they are asked to generate and therefore need to be supervised and instructed. Use of stacked AI processes are being explored to reduce this gap. As projects scale, AI based code generators face challenges.

It is important to understand that although AI based tools and processes are not capable of taking on complex tasks in programming and development, they are learning. AI is however a long way from replacing professionals in the IT field. The generic tasks such as data entry, interpretation, translation have already been taken over by it thereby freeing more time for creative initiatives.

T20 Dominance: India's ODI Challenge

VS Dhruvan

Team India is staring down a major challenge as they gear up for the 2025 ICC Champions Trophy. The upcoming cricket calendar is heavily dominated by T20 fixtures, leaving the 50-over format gasping for breath. With just three ODIs against England in February 2025 scheduled before the Champions Trophy, there's a serious concern about whether the team will be properly prepared to defend their title.

It's a problem that's hard to ignore. While T20 cricket has become the big money-spinner, drawing crowds and

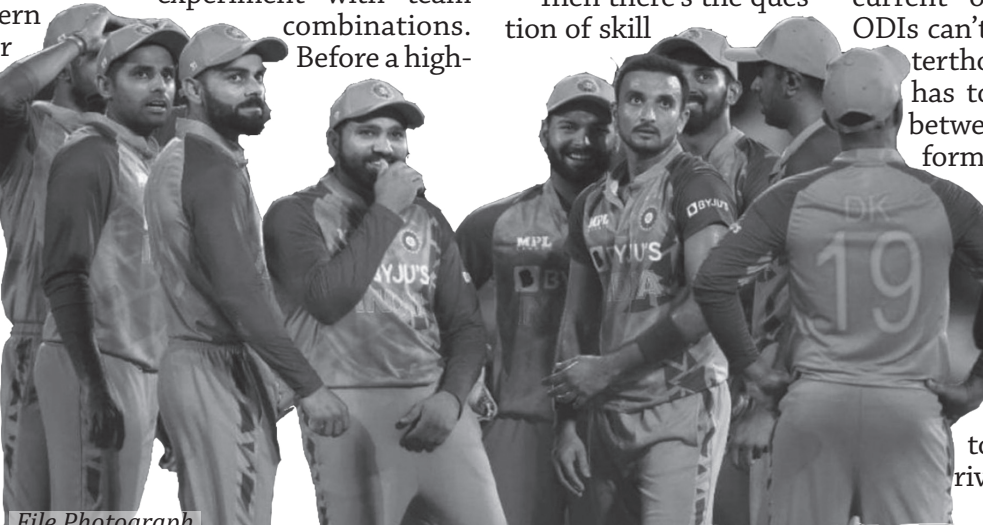
dominating attention, ODIs haven't lost their relevance. The 50-over format still plays a crucial role in international cricket. It demands a unique skill set, strategic depth, and the ability to adapt over a longer stretch of play, qualities that are not easy to sharpen without enough match practice.

The lack of ODIs also leaves little room to experiment with team combinations. Before a high-

stakes tournament like the Champions Trophy, you need to know who works best in what role, who can handle the pressure, and what strategies might click. But with so few opportunities to test different line-ups, the team management is stuck with guesswork instead of solid plans. It's not like you can head into a major tournament and just wing it.

Then there's the question of skill

development. ODIs require balance. Batters have to know when to accelerate and when to build partnerships. Bowlers need to figure out how to be both attacking and economical, depending on the match situation. Skills and techniques by the team need to be at the highest level because one dropped catch or a misfield can change the game. T20s may be the current obsession, but ODIs can't just be an afterthought. There has to be a balance between all three formats. The clock is ticking, and the BCCI must act to ensure that India is not left scrambling when the big tournament arrives.



File Photograph

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Chief Editor: Dr. Rajesh Kumar B M

Issue Editor: Dr. M S Harikumar

Editorial & Design Assistance: Dr. Renjith R

Editorial Board : Madhavan Panicker

Keerthana S S

Muhsina N B

Design & Layout : Aaliya M F

Aromal Dev J B

Geethna Kalesh

Photos : Aaliya M F

<http://dcjku.com/>
dcjkerala@gmail.com





FYUGP Ushers Change in Academia

Devananda M S, Economics:

"There are many disciplines and open courses to study in a short span. Adjusting from school to university is mentally challenging, but campus life offers enjoyable programs and freedom."

Anakha Ajith S, Political Science:

"This four-year programme offers opportunities to choose subjects freely, including skill-based courses, internships, and practical projects for real-world experience."

Arafa S, Economics:

"The campus environment requires self-study and motivation, unlike the spoon-feeding in schools. Despite fewer books in the campus library, the programme is good, allowing interdisciplinary studies."

International Perspectives

Yousuf, BBA (Sudan):

"My experience so far is good. The lectures are on time, and facilities are ready. Although some professors explain in Malayalam, which is confusing for international students, the programme's structure and integrated internship opportunities are advantageous."



Clara Chepkorir, Computer Science (Kenya):

"Despite joining late and the initial challenge of mid-terms, my experience has been positive, and I foresee a good quality education."

Christian Mark R Dades, BBA (Philippines):

"The programme is new to me, offering a wide variety of courses and opportunities, which is why I decided to join the university."

The FYUGP holds the promise of transforming higher education in Kerala. Its success hinges on the collaborative engagement of students, educators, and policy-makers.

By fostering open communication and embracing constructive criticism, Kerala University can ensure this ambitious initiative becomes a significant milestone in higher education rather than just another policy trial.

Keerthana S S

The Four Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP) at Kerala University marks a significant shift in higher education, aiming to dismantle the rigid structures of traditional academic pathways.

By promoting academic flexibility and encouraging interdisciplinary learning, FYUGP seeks to create a dynamic, responsive educational environment that aligns with the evolving needs of students and the demands of the modern workforce. This initiative fosters critical thinking, creativity, and practical skills, equipping students to navigate an increasingly complex world. Excerpts of opinions from faculty and students;

Dr. Sam Solomon, Director, highlighted the program's transformative nature:

"The FYUGP is entirely different from the previous one. Students now have the freedom to choose their subjects. For example, a student studying English can take minors in Physics, Artificial Intelligence, or Computer Science. We offer 51 minors for 16 majors, with foundation courses including Ability Enhancement, Multidisciplinary, Skill Enhancement, and Value Added Courses. While academic flexibility is a priority, administrative processes are structured for smooth operation."

Dr. Lal C A, Academic Coordinator, emphasised global alignment and benefits:

"The Four Year Graduation Programme aligns with international Universities, allowing our students to continue their education globally. Unlike the rigid 3-year programme, the 4-year programme offers numerous possibilities for students to choose their majors and minors, helping them face global challenges. The transition may be challenging, but orientations and support are in place to help students adapt."

Voices from the Student Community

Akash S, BBA:

"The programme seems easy to learn but it's challenging. The direct transition from school to campus creates a challenging environment."

Archa M, Maths:

"I love the flexibility to choose electives. It allows me to take a minor in any language alongside my major in Mathematics."

Malavika S, Maths:

"As the first UG batch on Kariavattom Campus, we face some tension adjusting to the environment and upcoming semester exams."

Akshaya R S, BBA

"We are optimistic. Being an experimental programme, we hope for the best despite uncertainties about the outcomes and exams."

Eternal Legacy

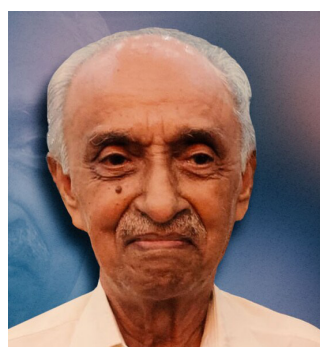
Alka Satheesh

The voice that once defined Kerala's evenings has now fallen silent. M. Ramachandran, who captured the hearts of listeners during the golden era of Malayalam Radio, is now a memory. The line "Kauthuka Varthakal vaayikkunnathu Ramachandran" (Ramachandran reading the news), was more than an introduction — it was a moment that brought families together in silence. He was a storyteller, his unique style of presenting news, almost like narrating a story, left the people of Kerala in awe.

At the age of 91, Ramachandran has passed away. He was the sound of countless memories and childhoods, a legacy that resonates in the anniversaries of All India Radio (AIR).

Ramachandran began his broadcasting journey with AIR Delhi, later transferring to Thiruvananthapuram as Kerala's radio network expanded. Before joining AIR, he briefly worked with the Kerala State Electricity Board. Following his retirement from AIR, he continued his career in radio by collaborating with various FM stations in West Asia. For many years, he was one of the most beloved news anchors of Akashvani in Kerala. At a time when there was no Internet or viral videos, and access to international news was limited, the program became a cherished source of unique information for regular listeners.

Ramachandran's legacy in Malayalam radio news continues to inspire and shape the future of news broadcasting in Kerala. The voice that influenced Kerala so deeply is no more. Yet, that voice will remain as a cherished memory in the hearts of Malayalis.



M Ramachandran

Waves of Words

Keerthana S S

In the luminous world of Malayalam literature, N S Madhavan stands out as a beacon of creativity and intellect, weaving stories that transcend the ordinary and delve into the profound depths of human experience. Born on September 9, 1948, in the vibrant city of Cochin, Madhavan's journey from a young scholar to a revered novelist and short story writer is a tale worth

telling in itself. His eclectic interests span beyond the realms of fiction, touching upon insightful football columns and evocative travel writing, painting a multifaceted portrait of an exceptional mind.

He pursued his education in Economics at Maharaja's College, Ernakulam, and the University of Kerala. His wife, Sheela Reddy, is an editor at Outlook, and their daughter, Meenakshi Reddy Madhavan, is a blogger and author. Madhavan began his career in the Indian Administrative Services in 1975. Despite his demanding job, he pursued his passion for writing, beginning with his award-winning short story 'Shishu' in 1970. However, the 1980s were challenging due to writer's block, which he overcame in 1990 with the critically acclaimed short story 'Higuita.'

His literary works, such as 'Thiruthu,' 'Chulaimedile Shavangal,' 'Nilavili,' and 'Muyal Vetta,' explore contemporary life's complexities and human condition. He published his first novel, 'Lanthan Batheriyile Luthiniyakal,' in 2003, and notable plays like 'Rayum Mayum' and 'Arbhuvaidyan.'



N S Madhavan



Lights, Camera, Kerala: IFFK's Exciting Film Magic

Geethna Kalesh

The 29th edition of the International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK) concluded successfully in Thiruvananthapuram, celebrating an impressive array of films and cultural perspectives. Held from December 13 to 20, 2024, and organized by the Kerala State Chalachitra Academy, the festival maintained its reputation for showcasing regional and international cinema that transcends mainstream conventions.

Festival Highlights

This year's festival opened with the International Competition section, featuring two Malayalam films that captivated global audiences. Fasil Muhammed's *Feminichi Fathima* (Feminist Fathima) and Indu Lakshmi's *Appuram* (The Other Side) stood out for their locally-rooted stories with universal themes. These films underscored the rising global influence of Malayalam cinema, highlighting its ability to resonate with diverse audiences.

The Malayalam Cinema Today category showcased twelve exceptional films, celebrating the state's rich cinematic traditions and contemporary storytelling. Among the notable films were Dinjith Ayyathan's *Kishkindha Kaandam*, featuring prominent actors Asif Ali and Aparna Balamurali, and A Pan Indian Story by V C Abhilash. Other highlights included Kamadevan Nakhathram Kandu (*Cupid Saw the Star*) by Adhithya

Baby and Mayunnu Marivarunnu Nishwasangalil (*Dust Art Redrawn in Respiration*) by Abhilash Babu. These films reflected IFFK's commitment to exploring diverse narratives and addressing pressing social themes.

Cultural and Cinematic Events

IFFK 2024 also hosted a series of enriching masterclasses, panel discussions, and workshops with international filmmakers, critics, and industry experts. These sessions fostered meaningful dialogues on the art and future of cinema, offering attendees valuable insights into filmmaking, direction, and cinematography.

Final Day and Awards

The festival concluded with the announcement of the prestigious awards. Pedro Freire's Brazilian film *Malu* won the Suvarna Chakoram (Golden Crow Pheasant) for Best Film, celebrated for its thought-provoking narrative and artistic brilliance.

Debutant director Fasil Muhammed's *Feminichi Fathima* (Feminist Fathima) emerged as a standout winner, securing five major awards, including the Rajata Chakoram (Silver Crow Pheasant) for Best Debut Director.

The 29th IFFK concluded as a resounding success, reinforcing Kerala's position as a vital destination for cinema enthusiasts and filmmakers worldwide.

Librarian's Cinematic Lens

Keerthana S S

Literature and films are the deadly combination of creativity. A unique blend of artistic vision and personal experience, Shobhana Padinjattillil, a librarian with a passion for storytelling, has made notable impact with her directorial debut, *Girl Friends*, which featured in the prestigious IFFK 2024. Her journey is a testament to her dedication. Let's explore.

Can you tell us about your journey from being a librarian to becoming a filmmaker?

Working as a librarian, I developed a deep appreciation for stories and their power to connect, evoke emotions, and inspire imagination. This naturally led me to film making, where I could transform written narratives into visual experiences. Film-making became a creative canvas, allowing me to explore storytelling dynamically and collaboratively with other creatives, crafting compelling narratives that resonate with viewers.

How did your career as a librarian influence filmmaking?

I hope to take the film to international festivals, and also online platforms for wider distribution. The film has a universal message, and I believe it can resonate with audiences across the globe.

How do you envision the future of *Girlfriends* in terms of distribution and reaching a global audience?

Independent cinema is evolving rapidly. It's an exciting time experimenting with bold narratives. I hope such films get the platform they deserve.

What is next you after *Girl Friends*?

Haven't decided yet, I'm open to exploring more after audience reactions on *Girl Friends*.



Shobhana Padinjattillil

What challenges did you face in terms of financing and distributing an independent film like *Girlfriends*?

Independent filmmakers often face challenges in securing finance and distribution. I self financed my film using my Provident Fund. Film festivals like IFFK are crucial for visibility.

What about *Girl Friends*?

Girl Friends is heartfelt exploration of identity, love, and friendship, centred around the life of a trans woman focusing on friendship and love.

How do you feel about being selected for the IFFK 2024?

It is a tremendous privilege and a dream come true. It is about contributing to a larger narrative that celebrates the strength and resilience of women everywhere.

What advice would you give to aspiring filmmakers, especially women?

Stay committed. It's not just about having a great idea; it's about nurturing that idea and allowing it to evolve over time.

It's Scientist Diving!

Smrithy M S



Dr. Anita Mary George

Were you aware that Kariavattom campus has India's first woman scientific diver? She is Dr. Anita Mary George, Assistant Professor on Contract at the Department of Aquatic Biology & Fisheries.

Growing up, Dr. Anita's love for the sea wasn't just a passing curiosity; it was a calling. Whenever she visited the beach as a kid, she kept pestering everyone with a queries of what creatures thrive beneath the ocean's surface!

Dr. Anita says that only a few have truly explored the depths of the ocean, and fewer still are women. Like many Indian families, Dr Anita's family also tried to redirect her towards the more conventional career route, but never succeeded. "Everyone was opting for medicine or engineering, but I wanted something different," she reflects. Her academic journey was equally unconventional. She earned a degree in Zoology, but a Master's course in Marine Biotechnology steered her toward her true calling.

Her story took a key turn when she met Dr. Robert Sluka, from Miami University, USA while she

was doing Masters in Marine Biotechnology, she was assisting Dr Lazarus, Head of Department, who appreciated her outstanding typing skills. Dr. Sluka mentioned about a National Geographic Society project on finding tourism sites at Kovalam, requiring a vibrant and enthusiastic Marine biologist willing to take a diving course. Without hesitation, Dr Anita volunteered, marking the beginning in her journey to become a scientific diver.

She faced several challenges. "I didn't know how to swim before my Master's degree," she admits. But learning became a necessity and soon, she was enduring hours in pool water. By acquiring the Open Water diving certification (20 m limit), with a couple of dives at Netrani and Grande Island, Goa in 2003, Anita became India's first woman scientific diver.

"In diving we need to follow the buddy system for safety and to share the compressed air for breathing in case there is a leak in the oxygen tank or if the buddy is not keeping well underwater" she explains. While working at Maldives, she upgraded herself to advanced open water certification, allowing her to dive up to 40 meters, the safest limit for Nitrogen exposure! We can still venture deeper than 40 m with Nitrox tanks, though for any coral reef research a 40m diving limit is more than enough. However, when she was doing her Post-Doctoral research at James Cook University, Australia, to explore the Great Barrier Reefs, she

was forced to complete the Rescue diver level.

Now as a Rescue Diver, Dr. Anita has over 300 research dives under her belt. She exclaims that each dive is a unique experience and every dive teaches something new. Dr. Anita coined a new type of meditation called 'Water Meditation,' a state of oneness with the ocean.

Dr. Anita worries about the pollution levels in the ocean especially plastics, river runoffs, oil spills and others like dredging for infrastructure development along the coast. Every curio or souvenir on seashells or other sea-related articles from the beaches might have been a habitat for creatures.

Dr. Anita's research paved her way to several conferences and interdisciplinary projects in different countries like the USA, Europe, Middle East, Australia and Indonesia where she found that fieldwork, not just lab analysis, was essential to meaningful marine research. She reflected that primary information is always more reliable,

Dr Anita M George has been working in our campus since December 2023. Her prime expertise is on the taxonomy, phylogeny and population genetics of Sessile Marine Invertebrates which includes Porifera (Sponges) and Cnidaria (hard corals and octocorals). She conducts research and mostly identifies shallow water sponges and octocorals and often describes new species from different localities of India. Apart from her teaching, she is passionate in her research and supports any student projects related to aquatic life especially coral reef and mangrove associated organisms. She hopes to inspire and train the next generation of marine scientists, offering them the chance to venture into the depths of the ocean. "A true scientist observes, learns a lot from the field and not just in the lab".

Lively Treasures of Democracy

Keerthana S S

Beneath the echoes of grand legislative debates and the footsteps of history, the walls of the Niyamasabha stand tall, holding tales of a bygone era and a future still unfolding. In the heart of Thiruvananthapuram, this emblem of Kerala's democratic journey weaves together the legacies of the Sree Moolam Popular Assembly and the modern legislative dynamics. As visitors step into the ornate halls and gaze upon artefacts of political evolution, they are reminded that democracy is not just a system, but a living, breathing entity shaped by the voices and actions of countless individuals across generations. Here, the past meets the present, inviting citizens to not only witness but actively partake in the ongoing narrative of governance and justice.

The Niyamasabha, or Kerala Legislative Assembly, has a storied history beginning December 12, 1933, at the Government Secretariat Complex. It initially hosted the Sree Moolam Popular Assembly and the Sri Chitra State Council during the Kingdom of Travancore, laying the foundations for modern legislative processes.

After India's independence, the hall became the legislative seat for the Travancore-Cochin state and later, Kerala post-1956 state reorganisation. The 1970s saw a need for more space due to increased legislative seats, leading to the construction of a new complex at Palayam, inaugurated in 1979 by President Neelam Sanjeeva Reddy.

The NiyamaSabha Gallery offers the public a view



Kerala Legislative Assembly hall

of legislative sessions, enhancing transparency and civic engagement. Its culturally reflective design makes it an educational hub. The old Army Headquarters has been transformed into NiyamaSabha Museum, which details Kerala's political history through artefacts and exhibits, including contributions from figures like E. M. S. Namboodiripad. It highlights Kerala's social justice commitment and legislative milestones.

Together, the NiyamaSabha Gallery and Museum preserve and educate about Kerala's democratic legacy, promoting public participation and connecting past and present governance. These venues stand as pillars of transparency, accountability, and community involvement, vital to Kerala's political heritage.

Rare Water Sprout in Vizhinjam Sea

Haneena Najeeb

Waterspout phenomenon was observed in Vizhinjam, Thiruvananthapuram on 23rd October at around 4.50 pm. According to the fishermen, the sprout lasted for about 25 minutes and disappeared after sudden evaporation. This was the first time such a phenomenon was reported here.

A waterspout is a rotating column of air that forms over water, typically manifesting as a funnel-shaped cloud connecting the water surface to a cumuliform cloud. During this event, a cloud formation similar to lightning drops from dark clouds above, causing the sea to swirl and create a vortex. This results water rising at multiple locations in the ocean. The phenomenon is initiated by a sudden

pressure difference between the clouds. Waterspouts usually form in cooler weather or tropical regions. When they move onto land, they can be dangerous.

The phenomenon was visible in Vizhinjam for about half an hour. This waterspout, which typically forms over water, can pose a danger to ships and boats. During the day, boats can change direction to avoid the waterspout by observing it from a distance. At the same time climate research centre's head Ms. Neeta K. Gopal stated that the phenomenon is not harmful and the situation is not alarming as the tornado that had occurred at the coast of America. She also warned fishermen to stay safe and out of the sea if any such phenomenon is noticed again, as a precaution



BETWEEN BOOKS AND BREWS...

Keerthana SS

The Cafe Bookmark, which opened its doors on June 19th this year, has quickly become a sanctuary for those who love to read. Nestled in the bustling lanes of Palayam, the Bookmark Café is more than just a place to grab a cup of coffee—it's a cultural oasis in the heart of Thiruvananthapuram. The Cafe is indelibly marked as a vibrant hub for book enthusiasts, offering a warm and welcoming atmosphere that encourages patrons to lose themselves in the pages of their favorite novels. Operating daily from 9 am to 9 pm, it serves as a gathering spot for students, avid readers, and anyone seeking a quiet place to unwind with a good book.

The cafe features an extensive collection of literature, ranging from classic works to contemporary bestsellers, ensuring that there is something for everyone. Comfortable seating arrangements, soft lighting, and the aroma of freshly brewed coffee create an ideal environment for reading, studying, or engaging in thoughtful discussions with fellow bibliophiles. In addition to its impressive selection of books, The Cafe Bookmark

also hosts regular events, including author readings, book signings, and literary discussions, further enriching the community's cultural landscape.

This initiative, envisioned by Abraham Mathew, Secretary of the Kerala State Book Mark under the Department of Culture, aims to breathe new life into a space that previously focused on selling government publications. His vision was to create a dynamic space that promotes reading and fosters a sense of community among literature lovers.

Cafe Bookmark stands as a testament to the power of literature to bring people together, offering a refuge for those seeking solace in stories and a platform for sharing ideas and experiences. As it continues to grow in popularity, it is poised to become a cornerstone of the local literary scene, inspiring a new generation of readers and writers alike.



The Unique environment within the cafe fosters a healthy habit of reading amongst youth

Sustainable and Empowered Journeys

Keerthana S S

OPPAM stands as a luminous testament to the power of holistic integration, blending economic, social, and technological strategies to elevate marginalised communities, with a heartfelt focus on women and tribal groups. The essence of its triumph is distilled from the harmonious collaboration of multiple stakeholders, including the National Bamboo Mission, Local Self Government Department (LSGD), Tribal Department, and the Sociology Department at the University of Kerala. These entities have woven together a vibrant tapestry of inclusive and sustainable development, each thread meticulously addressing the unique needs and aspirations of these communities.

The journey of OPPAM began at the Manithookki tribal settlement in the Vithura Grama Panchayat. This initial phase laid the groundwork for subsequent expansions. The training programs and initiatives conducted in Manithookki were carefully designed to empower the local community. By focusing on enhancing the skills and knowledge of the tribe members, the project aimed to create a sustainable model that could be replicated in other areas.

Upon the successful completion

of the training at Manithookki, OPPAM expanded its reach to other settlements, including Manali, Maruthamala, Peppara, Ponnammund, and Kallar. Each of these areas presented unique challenges and opportunities. By tailoring the project's strategies to the specific needs of these communities, OPPAM was able to create impactful change. The success in these settlements has paved the way for broader implementation, with the potential to uplift other marginalised sections of society.

Dr. Sandhya R S, Oppam Programme Director and Head of the Sociology Department, detailed the comprehensive nature of the programme. One of the key components of OPPAM is its focus on economic empowerment. By providing training in various skills, the project aims to enhance the employability and entrepreneurial capabilities of the community members. For instance, the partnership with the Kerala Bamboo Mission has been instrumental in teaching the community how to create and market bamboo products. These products not only provide a source of income but also promote sustainable and eco-friendly practices. The training programs cover a wide range of skills, including handicrafts, organic farming, and small-scale manufacturing. By diversifying the economic activities, OPPAM ensures that the community is not overly dependent

on a single source of income.

The holistic nature of OPPAM ensures that no aspect of community life is overlooked. By addressing economic, social, and technological needs in an integrated manner, the project creates a comprehensive support system for the marginalised communities. This multi-faceted approach is what sets OPPAM apart from other development initiatives.

Looking ahead, the future of OPPAM is bright. The project's success in the initial settlements provides a strong foundation for further expansion. Plans are already underway to extend the project to other marginalised sections of society. By continuing to build on the lessons learned and the successes achieved, OPPAM aims to create a ripple effect of positive change across the region.

In the grand mosaic of time, project OPPAM is a symbol of what can be achieved when vision and compassion converge. It is a movement towards a world where every individual, regardless of their background, is given the chance to bloom. This story reminds us all that within the heart of every community lies the power to craft a future filled with promise and possibility.

High-Tech Harvest with Code and Care

Aaliya M F

For many, integrating open-source software into farming might seem as foreign as learning a new language. But for this tech-savvy 43-year-old, it's as natural as breathing. Being in the IT field for over 20 years, S Santhosh Kumar, who hails from Kariavattom has created an automated system to control his hydroponic farm efficiently. He was interested in farming after taking a few classes on organic farming which led him to purchase a plot of land where he established his hydroponic organic farm. Hydroponics is a soil-free growing method. He faced a steep learning curve as the technology is still new in India.

He faced early losses due to not being able to monitor temperature and water flow. Further



S. Santosh Kumar in his hydroponic organic farm

research led incorporating hydroponic nutrients. Using old repurposed equipment, he set up his first hydroponic system augmented by self made software to create the system.

While continuing to work as a designer at a software company, he followed his farming passion. Using sensors driven automated system he can remotely monitor his hydroponic

system which uses less than 80% water compared with traditional farming, delivering nutrients directly to plants, keeping roots compact and well-fed.

Creating a beginner learning system, under 'FreshLeaves' brand, he aims to make hydroponics accessible while fostering a community that values sustainability and fresh produce while bridging the gap

between technology and traditional farming. His efforts won him the 2023 State Farm Award for innovation. His achievement is not requiring lot of effort into farming in a sustainable way but Santhosh has proven that it's possible and he continues to share his knowledge with the world in hopes of a better future in the sustainable farming industry.



PV Rajesh receiving National Jal Shakti Award

Treading Waters

Pullampara's Water Revolution

Smrithy M S

The air is warm and fragrant with damp earth as villagers gather by the newly filled pond in the village. Under the early sunlight, a few young boys ran barefoot along the paths, it's their time to gather, perform and enjoy themselves. Looking back, this little space of comfort was just a dream of many, many like P.V. Rajesh—the Panchayat President of Pullampara.

Pullampara, recognized as the "Best Panchayat" among 2 lakhs of Panchayats in India, at the 5th National Jal Shakti Awards of 2023-24, It's a place where hands came together to build ponds that now glitter like fragments of sky across 25 square kilometers. People of the Panchayat today know the importance of each spring shed revived.

For years, the people of Pullampara grappled with seasonal water scarcity, forcing residents to trek kilometers to fetch water from Vamanapuram River. The village shares a 12 kilometers border with the River. The Hilly area gets plenty of rainfall in seasons however there were no measures for retaining it. This sparked extensive water conservation efforts in 2021. "Neerurav", a watershed management project, restoration of natural spring systems, creating robust and sustainable water resources and conserving soil started under "Peoples Collective for Environmental Statements" slogan.

Under "Neerurav" initiative, Pullampara mapped and revived critical watershed areas, built 600 ponds, rainfall pits and introduced well recharge programs which significantly increased groundwater. Bund's or dam-like structures retained water from local streams, keeping it within the region. Collaborating with district's Haritha Kerala Mission and MGNREGA, a "Sajalam" spring shed project was launched focused promoting sustainable agriculture by improving soil moisture essential for year-round water supply.

"The 'Neerurav' and 'Sajalam' projects are not just about water management," explains P.V. Rajesh, the Pullampara panchayat president. "They represent a long-term commitment to environmental stewardship that integrates local participation at every level."

In addition the panchayat's "Kalari Vanam" afforestation project has brought new green life to Vamanapuram riverbank, with planting over 18,500 saplings. Local clubs and temples joined hands to support these efforts, helping transform riverbanks into thriving habitats that stabilise soil and improve local biodiversity.

These projects have promoted a culture of shared responsibility, inspiring Pullampara's 22,000 residents to join forces in protecting their environment. Haritha Karma Sena, a team of local women, monitors waste disposal and organizes regular clean-up drives.

Pullampara's model has inspired local neighboring villages and even teams from other states. It showcases how collective effort, rooted in local knowledge, can help combat even one of the most challenging environmental problems.

Cancer : A Doctor's Advice!

Madhavan Panicker

Cancer remains one of the greatest health challenges of our time, impacting millions worldwide. Amid this battle, dedicated professionals like Dr. Gayatri Gopan, a renowned medical oncologist at GG Hospital, stands as beacons of hope. In an exclusive conversation, Dr. Gayatri shares her expertise, answers pressing questions about cancer care, and offers invaluable advice for patients, caregivers, and the broader community.

What is cancer?

Cancer is not a single disease but a collection of over 100 different types, all characterised by uncontrolled cell growth. Normally, cells grow, divide, and die as needed, but cancer occurs when this process goes awry. Mutations in cells allow them to grow uncontrollably and resist the normal death process, leading to potential spread (metastasis) to other parts of the body.

What are the symptoms of cancer?

Cancer symptoms vary depending on the area affected, but some common warning signs include: unusual growths or lumps, sores that don't heal, changes in moles or warts, blood in urine, stool, or phlegm, unusual bleeding or discharge, changes in bowel or bladder habits, persistent cough, hoarseness, difficulty swallowing, unexplained weight loss, fever, and fatigue. While these changes might not necessarily

indicate cancer, they should be checked by a doctor.

What causes cancer?

Most cancers develop due to a combination of factors, including genetic changes, family history, and lifestyle choices. Some risk factors, such as aging and genetic mutations, are beyond control, but lifestyle factors like smoking, poor diet, lack of physical activity, alcohol consumption, and exposure to harmful chemicals can increase the risk. Certain infections, like HIV and HPV, are also linked to cancer risk. However, adopting a healthy lifestyle, regular screenings, and early detection can significantly reduce cancer risk.

What do cancer grades and stages mean?

The cancer grade refers to how much the cancer cells differ from normal cells. A higher grade means the cancer cells are more abnormal and may grow more quickly. The cancer stage indicates how much cancer is present in the body, its location, and whether it has spread. Stage 1 typically means the cancer is localised, while Stage 4 indicates it has spread to different sites.

How does cancer treatment work?

Cancer treatment varies depending on the type and stage of the disease. Common treatments include surgery, chemotherapy, radiation, hormone therapy, im-



Dr. Gayatri Gopan

munotherapy, and lately stem cell transplants. Often, a combination of treatments is used. Targeted therapies are also available to treat specific types of cancer cells.

How can early detection impact cancer treatment?

Early detection through regular screenings and awareness of symptoms can lead to more effective treatment and better outcomes. Diagnosing cancer early significantly improves the chances of successful treatment and recovery.

Can vaccines help prevent cancer?

Preventive vaccines like the HPV vaccine (protecting against viruses that cause cervical, anal, and other cancers) and the Hepatitis B vaccine (reducing the risk of liver cancer) can help prevent cancers linked to viral infections. These vaccines are most effective when administered before exposure to the virus, typically in younger individuals.

Is cancer research making a difference?

Research has made significant strides in understanding cancer, improving detection, diagnosis, and treatment. Advances in treatment mean that some cancers, like thyroid and testicular cancers, have survival rates exceeding 90%, and some cancers are now becoming manageable, turning cancer into a chronic condition.



Dr. A. Jayakrishnan



Dr. T.S. Anirudhan



Dr. A. Biju Kumar

UoK's Five Professors Ranked Among World's Top 2% Scientists

Aparna C Shekhar

The University of Kerala has achieved a milestone with five of its senior faculty members featured in Stanford University and Elsevier's prestigious 'Top 2% Scientists' rankings recognizing their significant contributions to global research. The distinguished professors are; A. Jayakrishnan (Chemistry, former Vice Chancellor and INSA Senior Scientist), T.S. Anirudhan (Chemistry Emeritus Professor), S.M.A. Shibli (Chemistry, Senior Professor), A. Biju Kumar (Biology), V. Biju (Physics)

Their selections were



Dr. V. Biju



Dr. S.M.A. Shibli

based on citations, using metrics such as h-index, co-authorship adjustments, and composite citation score (c-score). The rankings utilize Scopus data, with the top 2% or approximately 1 lakh scientists included.

This recognition marks the first time that multiple scientists

from the State-run university have made it to the influential list. The rankings provide a comprehensive view of the scientists' contributions to the global research community. India has a total of around 5,300 scientists featured in the list, updated up to August 1.

Patent for Hydrogel Wound Dressing

Smrithy M S

A major accomplishment is the patenting of a new wound dressing by Kerala University that promises to speed up healing in diabetes patients, who are more susceptible to sluggish, infection-prone wounds. Under the direction of Prof. Mini S, Biochemistry research scholar Fathima Rumaisa developed an innovative dressing, composed of ferulic acid, a phytochemical rich in antioxidants with anti-inflammatory and anti-diabetic properties. Known as "Synthesis of Ferulic Acid Incorporated Alginate Dialdehyde Gelatin Hydrogel Film," this gel-based hydrogel holds the potential to revolutionise diabetic care by accelerating the healing process and lowering the risk of infection in chronic diabetic wounds.

The hydro-

gel's formulation includes L-Proline, an amino acid essential for collagen formation, which plays a vital role in skin regeneration and scarless healing. This synergy between ferulic acid and L-Proline provides an ideal environment for wound repair and has shown positive results in pre-clinical trials on diabetic rats, with wounds healing effectively and without scarring. A standout feature of this dressing is its ability to detect infection intensity; it changes colour in the presence of chronic infection.

tion, allowing for timely intervention.

According to Fathima, the primary challenge diabetic patients face is prolonged healing time, often leading to infection, scarring, and even pus formation. Unlike typical wounds, diabetic wounds take much longer than the usual 7-day healing period and frequently leave scars. By addressing these issues, this dressing aims to revolutionise diabetic wound care.

The patent is granted for 20 years starting from February 2024. With clinical trials on humans set to begin soon, the team is optimistic about the hydrogel's potential and is also exploring its commercial viability. If the wound dressing reaches the market, it will undoubtedly provide an effective solution for millions of diabetic patients worldwide.



Fathima Rumaisa with Prof. Mini S

Sportify : Gaming Beats of Rugby

Keerthana S S

In a state where football and cricket dominate the sports scene, George Arogyam chose a different path, championing the rise of rugby in Kerala. From an aspiring athlete to a pioneering coach, his journey, guided by a mentor, is filled with vision and resilience. Today, George stands at the forefront of a growing rugby movement, inspiring young players and carving out a niche in Kerala's sports scene.

Breaking New Ground

In a state dominated by cricket and football, George ventured into the world of rugby, driven by the encouragement of his mentor, Mahesh. This question, "Why not give rugby a try?" Set him on a unique path.

A Passionate Beginning

In 2015, under Mahesh's guidance, George's coaching journey began. Mahesh, a rugby maestro, saw potential in George and nurtured it. George's new role marked the start of an exciting chapter in his life.

Crafting Excellence from Adversity

The bronze medal win at the 2015 National Games was a turning point. Inspired by this, then-secretary Jayakrishnan founded a new rugby association in Kerala, spurring the sport's growth.

Recruiting and Training New Players

The "Get Into Rugby" program introduced the sport to schoolchildren, uncovering young talent through trials and camps, and preparing them for national competitions.

Success Stories: Roshni and Reshma

Roshni and Reshma, from the Adimalathura-Pulluvila region, transitioned from athletics to rugby under George's guidance. Roshni now resides abroad, while Reshma continues to represent Kerala in rugby.

Transforming Rugby Spaces

The main challenge remains the lack of dedicated infrastructure. The LNCP grounds serve as the primary venue, but a true rugby ground is still a dream.

Rugby Roots in Villages

Rugby coaching courses were conducted for senior players who then established regional centres. In Thiruvananthapuram, centres like Vizhinjam and Aryanad are now active.

Her Rugby, Her Story

Women's participation in rugby is growing, supported by grassroots initiatives and community engagement. Women coaches play a vital role in fostering female talent.

Thread of Vision

Including rugby in tournaments in schools and colleges, fostering a supportive culture for growth.

Rugby's Grand Ascent

To become as popular as football and cricket, grassroots introduction, proper training, raising awareness, local leagues, and successful role models are essential.

Advice for Young Coaches

Passion, community engagement, relationships with schools, and persistence are crucial for young coaches to inspire others to love rugby.

George Arogyam's journey and the rise of rugby in Kerala illustrate the power of vision and effort. It shows that with determination, even the most daring dreams can come to life, making rugby a prominent sport in the region.



Kerala Women Rugby Team

Engage, Energize, Excel: Wave of Wellness

Keerthana S S

The Kerala Olympic Association has launched an inspiring initiative called 'Olympic Wave,' with the ambitious goal of fostering a healthier society and nurturing athletic talent. This forward-thinking project seeks to engage the entire community, focusing particularly on those aged 30 and above, including senior citizens.

The core of 'Olympic Wave' lies in its inclusive approach, aiming to reinvigorate the lives of senior citizens who have retired from various professional fields and now seek meaningful engagement. By involving these experienced individuals, the project not only addresses the issue of boredom and inactivity among the elderly but

also taps into their vast reservoirs of knowledge and experience.

Through a variety of activities and interactions, 'Olympic Wave' aspires to create a more vibrant, connected society. It leverages the rich experiences of retired professionals to strengthen the Olympic Movement and enhance the efforts of sports organisations affiliated with it. The initiative promises to bring a sense of purpose and vitality to senior citizens, fostering a stronger, healthier community that values physical activity and communal bonds and it promoting active lifestyles. 'Olympic Wave' is set to make a significant impact, contributing to the overall well-being of society and the development of sports in Kerala.

Why Indian Football has Failed to Score?

Alka Satheesh

"The goal of kids these days is to play for clubs like Kerala Blasters, this attitude should change and the ultimate goal of any player should be to represent their own country," CK Vineeth, a professional footballer playing for the Kerala Blasters, said.

Vineeth was speaking at a session highlighting rising concerns of India's stagnancy in football with Kamal Varadur, a renowned sports journalist. "Indian football once played in the Olympics semi-finals," Vineeth said. "To be in the top four is not a small talk and more than half a decade later the national team is not even worthy of a World Cup qualification."

Vineeth explained

how there were many grounds where he could play as a child, now almost all replaced by buildings.

Grounds are not freely accessible and even if they are, they are poorly maintained. He highlighted poor scouting in system academies and questionable association practices. "I believe Messi's prime in football was from age 16 to 28, but here in India most

academies start coaching at sixteen," Vineeth said.

Varadur spoke of the poor media attention that the world's favourite game receives in India. Mentioning the Argentine national team visiting Kerala in 2025, Vineeth said that the media really needs to focus on the local football arenas and competitions, such as the Santosh Trophy where

Kerala is into the semi-finals. "I don't think many people know that fact and it's concerning that people know Argentinian football more than their own," he said.

He criticised the lack of interest of sports journalists who merely report an issue without taking follow ups. "The grassroots level development of the game and the players still moves at a snail's pace," he said.



CK Vineeth with Kamal Varadur

ANANTHAPURI'S SCULPTED SOULS

Mahatma Gandhi
Eastfort

Sri Velu Thampi Dalawa
Statue, Palayam

C. Kesavan
Palayam

Ulloor S. Parameshwara Iyer
Central Library, Palayam

N. Kumaran Asan
Palayam

Sri Chithira Thirunal
Senate House, Palayam

Yuri Gagarin
Palayam

Swadeshabhimani K Ramakrishna Pillai
Palayam

K. Karunakaran
Kanakakunnu Palace

Mahatma Ayyankali
Vellayambalam

Accamma Cherian
Vellayambalam

Swami Vivekanandan
Kawadiyar

Vayalar Ramavarma
Nandavanam

C. V. Raman Pillai
PMG

