

LETTERS

Venice in Calcutta

● In all my teaching years, August 5 was the first time I had to wade through murky water on Park Street to reach the Metro station (*Submerged and stranded, August 6*). Our staffroom till 2.30pm, waiting for the downpour to decrease in intensity. My colleague and senior chemistry teacher, Siddhartha Das, and I started walking towards Park Street Metro station. On reaching Allen Park, we were shocked. The stretch ahead was flooded in knee-deep water. The traffic was sluggish and no cab was available, so we had no other option but to wade through that dirty water. My colleague decided to remove his leather shoes and walk barefoot. Such quirks of nature, a sunny morning and then a flooded afternoon, and consequently flooded streets made me wonder if this is God's way of indicating that nobody or nothing is above his law; the rich and the poor are all made to face the same distress at different points in life.

**Joeta Basu,**  
Senior economics teacher,  
St. Xavier's Collegiate School

● My school got over at 1.30pm, when the rain was at its heaviest. The school compound was waterlogged. The water was ankle-deep. When my friends and I left school, we were ready to wade through the rain. But what we weren't ready for was to find knee-deep water on the road. We had to struggle through the water, avoiding potholes and cars and trying our best not to fall, to reach the Metro station. By the time we did, we were drenched to the skin, even though all of us were carrying umbrellas. When we got down at Belagachia, we were surprised to see that it had rained only lightly compared with the situation in Central Avenue.

**Srijoni Sarkar,**  
Welland Gouldsmith School

● It was like any other rainy day when I left my school at Mandeville Gardens around 2.30pm. It was drizzling when I boarded the S2B bus to go to Manikata. Right from Gariahat, the traffic was choco-bloc. It took me half an hour to reach Modern High School. After seeing the waterlogged streets there, I realised that it had rained quite heavily in that area. Another 30 long minutes later, I reached Park Circus, only to find the situation worsen. From there to Calcutta National Medical College and Hospital, the after-effects of the downpour were evident. It was a deluge. Thank God, I was inside a bus. The traffic crawled and I reached Senlidh after an hour and a half. My sole companion was my mobile phone, which helped me keep my family posted and also kept me engaged. I got busy clicking pic-

WATERLOGGED CITY THROUGH YOUR EYES



BEHALA



SALT LAKE



DUM DUM PARK

SONARPUR

Pictures by Pritam Roy, Sandeep Kumar Agarwal, Sudipto Mondal and Abhijit Sinha

tures and sending them to my colleagues and family members. By the time the bus reached Rajabazar, it was 5.30pm. I could see the lanes and bylanes flooded. The traffic came to a standstill. I decided to get off the bus and walk to Manikata, from where I thought I would take an auto to Vivekananda Road. When I reached Manikata, I found that the vehicles would not budge even an inch, so I continued my journey on foot and reached Vivekananda Road at 6.10pm, happy and hopeful that I would finally be home. Little did I know then that my ordeal would not end there. When I reached Srimani

Bazar, the main road was waterlogged. I stood there for a few minutes, wondering what to do. I then started wading through ankle-deep water but as I proceeded, the water level rose. Luckily, I spotted a rickshaw. He dropped me home but the three-minute ride cost me Rs 40 as he had to pull the rickshaw through knee-deep water. I reached home at 6.40pm, four hours after I had left school.

**Sruichi Soni,**  
Teacher, South Point School

● The chief minister should reconsider her plan of transforming Calcutta into London. Instead, she should opt

for Venice with its waterways. For this, she does not have to work too hard—all that is needed is to add a fleet of gondolas to ply on the flooded roads.

**Shirpa Chakraborty,**  
CIT Road

● Central Howrah, especially Panchanatala Road (the stretch from Panchanan Temple to Bellilous Lane), is submerged even in a drizzle (*Nabhana dry, others drown, August 1*). This has been a chronic problem for years. The water even enters houses opposite Bankim Park. The situation in the serpentine bylanes of Tikiapara is precari-

ous with rainwater remaining stagnant for days. The Howrah mayor's initiative to install a pumping station near Panchanan Temple is expected to reduce waterlogging from next year if it becomes operational on schedule. Hazard and illegal building construction and drains blocked by plastic are to blame for the waterlogging.

**Debabrata Sengupta,**  
Bridandam Mullick Lane,  
Kadamtala, Howrah

● I travelled along the Bypass recently when I had to visit a house in Kasba. The hazards of the journey arising out of the multitude of bottlenecks described in the article *Crater to puddle to crater... spot the road* (July 31) matched my experience. I often go to Kasba and every time I take this route, which is the easiest for me from Salt Lake, my experience is no different. The slow traffic and long wait compounded the trouble, especially for senior citizens like me.

**PB. Saha,**  
Salt Lake

● This is to highlight the issue of excessive waterlogging faced by the residents of the Narendrapur area near the station. The road was waterlogged for two weeks. We complained to the local councillor several times but to no avail. It was a nightmare to return from office and then wade through waist-deep water to reach home. Snakes, frogs and other animals abound. The absence of street lights makes it worse. A resident of Narendrapur

Bypass bane

● I live in Baishambhata Patuli and to reach my workplace, Media Superspecialty Hospital, in Mukundapur, a distance of about 3km, it takes me an hour and 45 minutes on a rainy day. Add to that the craters on the road (they can no longer be termed potholes), and you have an ingredient for health disaster. I dread returning home since I have to drive through the deadliest stretch beside Satyajit Ray film institute. It's traumatic, both mentally and physically. Two days ago, I suffered a back muscle sprain and since this morning my shoulder is hurting. Our neighbourhood has recommended I wear a back and neck support to escape the wrath of that road. The fact that a young man lost his life because of a fall there seems to have affected nobody? Is anybody listening?

**Soma Bhan,**  
VP-PR, Branding & Events,  
Member, Central Operating Group,  
Metro Health Hospitals

**WRITE TO US AT:**  
tmetro@bpmail.com  
www.facebook.com/tmetro

6 Prafulla Sarkar Street  
Tel: 700 0101

The luxury of talking art

FIFTH YEAR RUNNING



The group discussion on the last day of the three-day Experimenter Curators' Hub



(From left) Doryun Chong, the inaugural chief curator of M+, Hong Kong's new museum for visual culture; Giovanni Carmine, the director of the Swiss museum, Kunst Halle Sankt; and Matt Packer, director, Centre for Contemporary Art Derry-Londonderry

SOUMITRADAS

Art is increasingly becoming a preserve of the rich, and as the prices of art work sky rocket, it is turning into a luxury product. Thus spake Giovanni Carmine, the director of the Swiss museum, Kunst Halle Sankt Gallen, during a private conversation in the Experimenter Curators' Hub from July 23 to 25 at the eponymous gallery. In a separate conversation, another speaker chimed in. He is Matt Packer, director, Centre for Contemporary Art Derry-Londonderry. The young man says for people from a modest background like himself it is becoming increasingly difficult to fend for themselves if they choose to study art.

Subhojit Kerkar, who is setting up the Museum of Goa, remarked pertinently during a question-and-answer session: "Knowledge of contemporary art is confined to only 10 per cent Indians who speak English leaving out 95 per cent of the population." He congratulated artist Jitish Kallat, who had curated the 2014 Kochi Muziris Biennale, the art festival in Kerala, and who was one of the speakers, for making it more accessible -- it attracted 5,000 people.

But Kallat's rambling preamble was philosophical and poetic by turn, and his presentation was peppered with jargon. He did make some valid points though. To quote him from his "Biennial Leaf":

"Like art-history, curatorial practice has evolved its own form of narration and a supply vocabulary through the tools of exhibition-making, if art-history focuses on art that has already happened, curating attends to art as it happens."

As to Kallat's "curatorial journey": "A reflection of this navigational history (Kochi's), as well as of a shift of one's gaze delimiting on the mysterious expedition of our planet Earth hurtling through space at over a dizzying 100,000 km per hour... were two prompts made in my letter to artists... one was a gaze directed in time, the other in space."

This is the fifth year of the Hub, the only event of its kind held in the country organised by Experimenter in association with the Swiss Arts Council, Pro-Helvetia, British Council, Japan Foundation, Polish Institute, New Delhi, and the Sharjah Art Institute. As in other years, the 10 speakers could be heard only from certain vantage points in the gallery. Hoer Al Qasimi, president and director of the Sharjah Art Foundation, was the only speaker to speak via Skype.

The only speaker who could make the audience laugh was Doryun Chong, the inaugural chief curator of M+, Hong Kong's new museum for visual culture. He was born and raised in Korea, and went to University of California at Berkeley, worked at the Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art in New York, among others, and was "fascinated by and impressed with the scale and ambition, as well as potentials of M+ and the West Kowloon Cultural District, which the museum is part of, and I was convinced that this is something I'd like to try at this stage of my work and career." He added: "The museum is not an art museum but a museum for visual culture, which consists of three main areas of Design and Architecture, Moving Image, and Visual Art."

One of Doryun Chong's slides on M+ read: 20th and 21st cen visual culture, broadly defined from a Hong Kong perspective. He explained it thus: "The Hong Kong perspective is very simple -- in the sense that any serious museum should start from, and look at the world from where it stands."

As to the collection, "... last three years, we have focused on artists from Hong Kong, China, and wider East Asia, but we're beginning to look at those in the Southeast and South Asian, as well as West Asian (Middle Eastern) regions."

His target audience? "We want to attract a wide range of audiences -- ordinary people for whom museum-going may not be so familiar to those who are more educated and sophisticated."

Tasneem Zakaria Mehta, managing trustee and honorary director, Dr Bhanu Daji Lad Museum, Mumbai, introduced herself as an "interlop-

er" as she invites contemporary artists to respond to the museum's "remarkable" 19th century collection, history and archive. During the Raj, Indian artists were not considered "fine" enough, and the collection stopped with Dhurandhar. But the museum had a "historic relationship" with the JJ School of Art. The coloniser constructed an Indian identity then. So artists today questioned "original premises" and subverted them.

The Swiss museum, Kunst-halle Sankt Gallen, has a peculiar logo -- a sausage for which this capital of a Swiss canton is famous. The other mascot are the old Roman symbols of a bundle of sticks or fasces (from which the word fascist originates) and a magnifying glass. Giovanni Carmine, director of the art gallery in Switzerland, says with a gleam in his eyes, that "people did not find it (fasces) problematic". It all depends on interpretation. And the magnifying glass stands for interrogation or scrutiny. Carmine says he does not have a huge budget (55 per cent public money, rest fund-raising "but there is a lot of energy and good friends.") Offering its public easy access to contemporary art is of prime importance, and he shows "everything" from paintings to conceptual art. The white cube gallery has a long history. It is always "something new and challenging." It has to be "art that makes me think... ask questions about myself and what I am looking at." A slide displayed the striking red carpet rolled out by Swiss visual artist "Pipilotti Rist to cover that and natural world, but also the surrounding buildings. During the Spring Fair, director Giovanni Carmine asks for a booth to show projects.

Carmine has organised international programmes with artists from Egypt, Lebanon, UK and Latin America. He admits that "Asia is a continent that we don't know so well."

Londonderry is a deeply divided city with the people torn between Irish Republicanism and British Loyalty. They found peace only recently after 350 years of discord. This influences the school structure and the way. Matt Packer, the director of the museum in Northern Ireland, CCADerry, asserts that segregation is "self-imposed." His job is "to create space that does not support or contradict" and "exploring the limits of humanism." He was influenced by Timothy Morton "who argued for a broader understanding of ecology that embraces not only the human and natural world but also the world of objects and ideas."

Group exhibitions and solo projects on "decentering and deprivileging of human agency" are part of his plan. There is a further mandate to show Irish and British artists within an international context. Matt has taken risks, and "generously support new ideas."

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২০ আগস্ট • সন্ধ্যা ৬টা

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