

# Green is the word

**Students and teachers at Vadavalli Panchayat Union School work together and maintain a plastics-free campus.**

K. JESHI

Sixteen varieties of hibiscus, hue-changing roses, ornamental flowers and flowering plants, decorate the campus of Vadavalli Panchayat Union School. The campus, a dump yard of plastic waste for more than 22 years, is now clean and green. And the team behind the magical transformation is headmaster R. Rameshan and his students.

Three years ago, they joined hands, took an oath to ban plastics on their campus and the result is a healthy environment. "Our students don't drink water from plastic cups or use plastic straws even outside school," Rameshan adds. And, plastic bags have been replaced by cloth and paper bags.

What marked the beginning of the change is a slide show by environmentalist M. Yoganathan. "When they saw the visuals of an

elephant that died near Kallar after consuming plastic bags, they understood the health hazards of plastics," Yoganathan says.

As Std.V students, K. Kumudham and K. Soundarya, put it: "From the presentation we learnt about environment conservation and the need to protect wild animals in their natural habitat."

Another student B. Anandraj says he learnt about the depletion of the ozone layer and about the poisonous gases that emanate when plastic bags are burnt.

## Carrying the message

"We have 120 students and through them we have taken the awareness to their families too," the headmaster adds. Most of the students are from economically weaker sections and from families of floating labour population.

Besides flowering plants, there is Singapore cherry plant (whose sweet fruits seem to be every bird's favourite), *malai mungai* tree, *pungan* and neem trees and herbal plants on the campus premises.

T.R. Manimegalai and P. Tamizhselvi, who teach at the school, say the students take extra care to nurture the plants. "They get



**VOW TO ABOLISH PLASTICS:** For a welcome change. PHOTO: S. SIVA SARAVANAN

thrilled when a new leaf or bud sprouts from the plants. They water the plants regularly and remove the weeds too," they add.

Yoganathan conducts regular workshops at the school on water

management and recycling, paper bag making and on developing the green cover. "Along with information on harmful chlorofluorocarbons in nail polish and lipstick, we also tell them about healthy alter-

natives such as applying *mehendi* on their hands through a practical workshop," Yoganathan adds. The students also discuss issues related to the environment during the morning prayer session.