



HERE COMES A SONG

The Beatles legend Ringo Starr is working on a new studio album. Last week, recording engineer Bruce Sugar posted a photo on social media with the English drummer and Steve Lukather, guitarist for All-Starr Band. Starr's last album *Give More Love* was released in 2017.

SNAP SHOTS



Word to Screen

IN THE award-winning book, *The Ivory Throne: Chronicles of the House of Travancore* (HarperCollins India, 2015), Manu S Pillai delves into the dynamics of the princely court in colonial India and retells the story of Sethu Lakshmi Bayi, the last queen of the House of Travancore. Its audio-visual rights have now been optioned by Arka Mediaworks, which produced the *Baahubali* series. "I am delighted that Arka has optioned *The Ivory Throne*... Sethu Lakshmi Bayi, one of India's most remarkable queens, with a life story that is truly gripping — it is most exciting to visualise her tale on screen, and I look forward keenly to the day this happens," said Pillai in a statement. His second book *Rebel Sultans: The Deccan from Khilji to Shivaji* was released last year.



Tough Ascent

A FILM on the first Chinese mountaineers to summit the world's highest peak will star China's action heroes Jackie Chan (pictured) and Wu Jing. The action-adventure film, titled *Climbers* (in English), will be directed by Hong Kong filmmaker Daniel Lee. It will show the journey of Wang Fuzhou, Gonpo, and Qu Yinhua, who made the ascent up Mount Everest's North Ridge in 1960.

Fresh Wounds

DEV PATEL-STARRER *Hotel Mumbai*, based on the 26/11 terrorist attack in Mumbai, has been pulled out of theatres in New Zealand in the wake of the Christchurch shooting. Slated to open on March 14, it is based on the documentary *Surviving Mumbai*, and is directed by Anthony Maraz.



Leaving a Stamp on History

An exhibition of stamps from the Ewari Family Collection is a window to the Nizam of Hyderabad's British allegiance and his architectural finesse

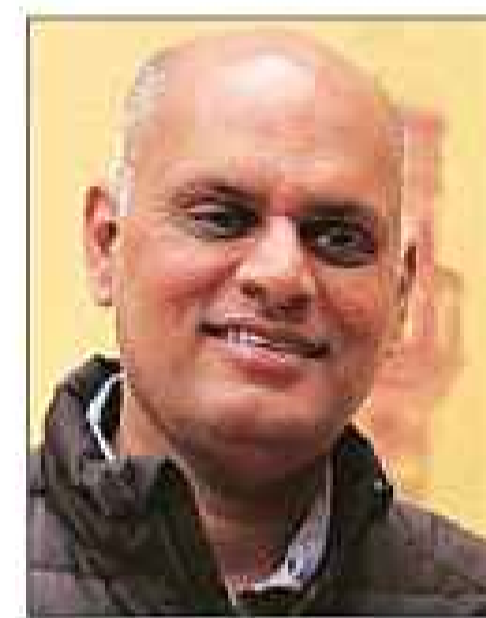


(Clockwise from above) Photographs of Hyderabad by Raja Deen Dayal form the backdrop for the exhibition; the stamps hold symbolical meaning, through emblems, seals and imagery; curator Pramod Kumar KG

VANDANA KALRA

FEATURING A profile of Queen Victoria, the world's first adhesive postage stamp, Penny Black, was issued in May 1840, and this is where curator Pramod Kumar KG also opts to begin his exhibition titled "Property of A Gentleman: Stamps from the Nizam of Hyderabad's Dominions". Acquainting us with the global developments in philately, he swiftly moves to India, where the first stamp was printed not much later, in 1852, in Sindh. In 1869, came the first postage stamp of Hyderabad. In olive green and with a one anna denomination the "exquisite stamp", Kumar tells us, "was probably designed by an eminent calligrapher". Being a traditional Muslim state, the use of human figures on stamps was forbidden, making the stamps from Hyderabad distinct and also compelling its designers to innovate. The vast territory also meant that the stamps used four languages — Marathi, English, Telugu and Persian (replaced by Urdu in 1930).

It was less than a year ago that Kumar was contacted by the Gujral Foundation to curate the exhibition that features the Ewari Family Collection, dating back to Postmaster General Nawab Iqbal Hussain Khan, who worked under Hyderabad's seventh and last Nizam, Mir Osman Ali. "Through the exhibition we hope to convey the history and significance of stamps. These were important for communication and also had a symbolical meaning, with



the emblem, seal and imagery," says Kumar. Comprising over 150 stamps, the exhibition display has photographs of Hyderabad by Raja Deen Dayal, the official photographer to the Nizam of Hyderabad, as backdrop. The stamps, meanwhile, are carefully kept in custom-made box-frames with LED lights. "These have to be handled very delicately and protected from harsh light," says Kumar, Managing Director of Eka Archiving. Carefully encased, he points out how the 'Skeleton Stamps' only displayed the outline of the text and design, without any colour filled in and carried the monogram 'Sarkar-e-Asafiya'. "The designing was done locally and works were sent to England, where plate engravings were created and sent back for printing of the stamps," he says.

One of the most interesting segments of the exhibition is the architectural series that feature prominent monuments from the Nizam's domain — from the Buddhist caves of Ajanta to the Kakatiya Kala Thoranam at Warangal and the Charminar at Hyderabad. The then newly constructed monuments, including the Osman Sagar reservoir and the Unani general hospital can also be seen. "This is a Muslim ruler who had no qualms about using the image of a Hindu site," says Kumar.

While some of the stamps display printing errors "that make them more valuable", there is also an exception to the general rule of not featuring a person on the stamp — the victory commemoration stamp issued on December 6, 1945, to recognise the support extended by Mir Osman Ali Khan to the British during World War II. It is inscribed with the words: "Faithfully Hyderabad War Purposes Fund 1939 — Till Victory" and has a mother and a child welcoming a soldier who seems to be returning from war. "The Nizam not only extended monetary support to the British but his soldiers also fought for the British in Egypt. These stamps reveal such interesting histories and facts that one might not be aware of," says Kumar.

While the viewers can browse through postal ephemera that includes letters, court receipts, greeting cards and stationery, the exhibition also introduces them with associated terms such as the Dak Runner who "carried public and private mail using their speed inherent knowledge of inland routes" and Mail Plane, sharing how "the first official airmail was delivered in India". Even as photo enthusiasts head to the Selfie Point to pose with themselves in the centre of a deconstructed form of the last stamp of Hyderabad before the princely state merged into India, Kumar hopes they also return from the exhibition with more interest in postal history.

The exhibition is at Bikaner House, Delhi, till March 24, from 10am to 6pm

On the Move

Contemporary dancer Surjit Nongmeikapam's recent piece draws on Manipur's turbulent history



Surjit Nongmeikapam (centre) with his dancers

PALLAVICHATTOPADHYAY

WHEN MANIPURI dancers Waikhom Biken and Senjam Hemjit took to the stage at Delhi's India International Centre's auditorium last week, as part of the ArtEast festival, their dance piece *1 sq. ft* brought back disturbing flashbacks. Images of Syrian refugees escaping their homeland, sitting atop boats, dressed in life jackets and lost in the Mediterranean Sea came rushing to the mind with this dance performance, choreographed by award-winning choreographer Surjit Nongmeikapam, when the two dancers recreated the body movements of rowing a boat using a tall bamboo stick. The life-threatening journey taken by immigrants in the hope of a better place form the crux of the 30-minute dance piece.

Manipur-born Nongmeikapam, 32, is dragged by co-dancers Bike and Hemjit, who have performed alongside him in his dance productions in the past, as his body lies atop a bamboo stick held by the duo, indicating the onslaught of sickness on their sea journey. We can't help but remember the haunting image of the deceased body of the three-year-old Syrian refugee Aylan Kurdi that washed up on a Turkish beach in the September of 2015.

The inspiration for *1 sq. ft*, says Nongmeikapam, came from the tales that his grandmother, Pishak Nongmeikapam,

narrated to him as a child, of her experiences in Manipur during the Battle of Imphal in 1944, when the Japanese tried to eliminate the allied forces in Imphal and their unsuccessful attempt at invading India. Her stories form the initial narrative of the performance. Nongmeikapam says, "As a child, I used to hear about the Japan war and how my grandmother suffered. She had to run to different places to survive. There were a lot of air strikes even in Manipur. One of the biggest battles was in Imphal and Kohima for the Second World War and many Japanese, Indian and British soldiers died in that period. What I realise now is that such wars are still going on and people are escaping for their life and to survive."

Co-founder of Nachom Arts Foundation in Manipur that focuses on contemporary art movements, Nongmeikapam says, "This work is called *1 sq. ft* because our properties are named in these terms. We always ask property dealers and owners of how many square feet of land they have. When I travel, I merely need one square foot to stand freely but there is no such space today."

His works have toured several countries including France, the US, Singapore and the UK. His last piece, *Nerves*, gave voice to the indigenous communities of Manipur, where dancers in tribal loincloth and military footwear, took centre stage.

Drama and Drapes

From saris and dramatic headgear to Bollywood celebrities and theatre, the closing of the Lotus Make-Up India Fashion Week evoked mixed feelings



(From left) Amit Aggarwal's offering in black; actor Radhika Apte for Pawan Sachdeva; Prashant Verma's dramatic Victorian gown



EKTAA MALIK

IT WAS intrigue and curiosity that marked the closing of Lotus Make-Up India Fashion Week Autumn Winter '19 (LMIFW AW19). Not only were A-list designers conspicuous by their absence but the grand finale and its theme too were under wraps. The *Etu Show*, from the Jakarta Fashion Week, cancelled last minute and the other shows of the evening were delayed at least by an hour. The reason, allegedly — the late arrival of actor Jim Sarbh, who walked the ramp for designer Siddhartha Tytler. The week-end highlights:

Politics and Performance

One can always expect food for thought

with Pranav Mishra and Shyma Shetty's label HUEMN, and they didn't disappoint. This time they took the cause of the Kashmiri youth. Their show HUEMN's Fall 19 was inspired by the duo's travels to Kashmir, and they juxtaposed the raw energy of the youth, with the serene backdrop of the Valley. There were landscapes, and flora and fauna on their creations. Staying true to their anti-fit and androgynous narrative, HUEMN blended rubber and leather in their style story. One saw long-sleeved sweatshirts, bombers, tunic dresses and trousers, in vibrant shades — a welcome change from their otherwise dark colour pallets — teal, burnt Sienna, olive and black. One also saw echoes of the 'sneaker culture', which was dominant in the '90s, which they appropriated by adding leather leg warm-

ers. Meanwhile, designer Prashant Verma, brought his love for the performing arts to the ramp with *The Miracle Show*, a theatrical presentation, which had him sitting on the runway and singing a Harold Arlen classic *Over the rainbow*. Models danced their way on and off the ramp, wearing oversized, dramatic Victorian-era gowns in velvet and sheer fabrics. Verma used models from all age groups, from a 10-year-old boy to older men and women.

Textured Tales

Designer-duo Pankaj and Nidhi presented their Autumn Winter '19 collection in an open arena, with a square ramp walk. Inspired by *Still Life with Flowers in a Glass Vase*, an artwork by Dutch artist Jan Davidisz de Heem, the line used shades of black, maroon, salmon and forest green on capes, jackets, dresses, skirts and stand-alone pieces. One saw a lot of geometrical texturing, intricate trapunto quilting — a signature of the duo — and trellises that embellished the ensembles. Highly detailed faux-leather cutwork, sequined petals and cutwork added an extra layer of glamour and drama to the collection.

B-Town Invasion

Taking cues from Mumbai's fashion weeks, there were Bollywood appearances too. Besides Sarbh, there was actor Radhika Apte, who wore an all-black ensemble for designer Pawan Sachdeva. Producer Guneet Monga, who is riding high on the success of *Period. An End of a Sentence* at the Oscars, walked for designer Rohit Kamra, who had also roped in actor Aparshakti Khurana for his show. Diana Penty and Aditi Rao Hydari too walked the ramp for the finale.

Draped and How

The grand finale for the LMIFW AW19, was titled #sixtyardsof and had 21 designers present their interpretation of the sari. While some stuck to their oeuvre and played with texture and fabrics, some really pushed beyond the six yards with its drape. Wendell Rodericks presented a yin-and-yang sari in black and white, where the drape was fashioned over a bodycon swimsuit, making it fit for a day on the beach. Amit Aggarwal brought structure and definition to the otherwise fluid drape, with two gold and black offerings. Little Shilpa, the label of Shilpa Chavan, who is primarily a milliner, presented three looks, and topped them off with a dramatic head gear — which will not look out of place in a *Game Of Thrones* episode. Additionally, she also had a male model wear the sari, where the *pallu* was draped around the neck.