

PEEK INTO THE PAST IIC's achievements and heritage PHOTOS: BHAGYA PRAKASH K.

# Sketching IIC's journey

The Indian Cartoon Gallery in the city celebrates eight years of clever laughs

RANJANI GOVIND

While the Indian Institute of Cartoonists (IIC), formed in 2001, completes 15 this year, the Indian Cartoon Gallery in the city, started in August 2007, celebrates its eighth birthday with 115 National and International exhibitions to its credit. Although the art of cartooning came to India as a British import, the word "cartoon" is an Italian derivative, which means "large paper".

The art is said to have evolved over the last century in India and gradually forayed into newspapers and

magazines.

Over the years the messages in the small monochrome sketches caught the eye of not just commoners but also dictators, heads of state and monarchs, who observed and relished the sarcasm and humour artistically woven together. Thus began cartooning in India, tickling the funny bone, moulding public opinion, drawing attention to political or social developments or the wit of cartoonists showcasing people's follies!

Says V.G. Narendra, Managing Trustee, IIC, "For a long time, despite cartoons gaining popularity, there was

no national level organization to represent these artists. A body to recognise and showcase them was necessary for the art to flourish. This is where the Bengaluru-based IIC stepped in."

In 2001 IIC, in its inaugural valedictory function, felicitated leading cartoonists of India with Lifetime Achieve-

ment Awards to Mario de Miranda, S.K. Nadig, S.D. Phadnis, Pran, Gopulu, Babu and Yesudasan amongst others.

Soon it was recognised by international galleries too, which started taking part in IIC proceedings year after year.

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## Draw on this

If there is a renowned cartoonist in India, who cuts across language barriers and is known to be visually expressive with his art, it is S.D. Phadnis. The doyen was born in Belgaum district in 1923. "He belongs to a rare species of cartoonists who is not into political cartooning, that makes him even more exceptional," informs Narendra. After taking a diploma in Commercial Art from the J.J. School of Arts, Mumbai in 1949, his hobby turned into a career and he almost pioneered, bringing up his captionless cartoons on magazine covers. Known for his stylized grace and gentle humour that instantly comes out in his deft visuals, Phadnis' collection has been part of the International Salon of Cartoons at Montreal and Germany. He was also

felicitated with a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2001 by the IIC. Phadnis' audio-visual programme, 'Chitrahhas' has him talking and demonstrating the art of cartooning that he has presented across the globe, while TV programmes in India included the national telecast of UGC education programming wherein Phadnis presented the nuances of the art in several series. With several books to his credit Phadnis is happy on his no-language stand, "The visual experience offered by society is rich and universal and I enjoy this more than anything else," says the modest artist. The 93-year-old's 50 cartoons are presently on display at an ongoing exhibition at Indian Cartoon Gallery, Midford Garden, Off M.G. Road, and will continue till September 26.

# Sketch this

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Later Ashok Kheny, M.D. of NICE Corridor, an admirer of cartoons, helped the institute get a 5,000 sq ft of cartoon gallery space for exhibitions, library and conference hall where it is presently working from.

**Exhibitions and workshops**

"We arrange workshops for budding cartoonists to see to it that the art is preserved for posterity," says Narendra.

"In three years we have had nearly 500 students, who have been trained in our workshops," he states. International cartoon contests are also arranged, and IIC also constituted the

Maya Kamath Memorial Awards Competition which brings in entries from China, Russia, U.S. and European countries too.

Offering a cash prize of a lakh, it has become India's popular organised contest for leading cartoonists, says Narendra.

Besides this, it has famous cartoonists such as Mario de Miranda, R.K. Laxman as its mentors. That is not all; some of the leading exhibitors have been Madan Babu, T. Venkat Rao, Vasant Saravate, Yesudasan, Thomas and Prabhakar Rao Bail.

It is 15 years since the then Union Minister of Culture and Tourism Ananth

Kumar promised the IIC that the Ministry of Culture would accommodate the Institute in the National Gallery of Modern Art.

Later with the Institute's Honorary Chairman, Ashok Kheny's offer, it has been functioning off M.G. Road. But Narendra exhorts that the Government allots them 10,000 sq. ft. space so that "we have a 'House of Cartoons' with conference halls, library and residential facilities built in with a special picture hall for screening cartoon films for children."

The Institute is seeking support for garnering funds for taking across the art in many ways.

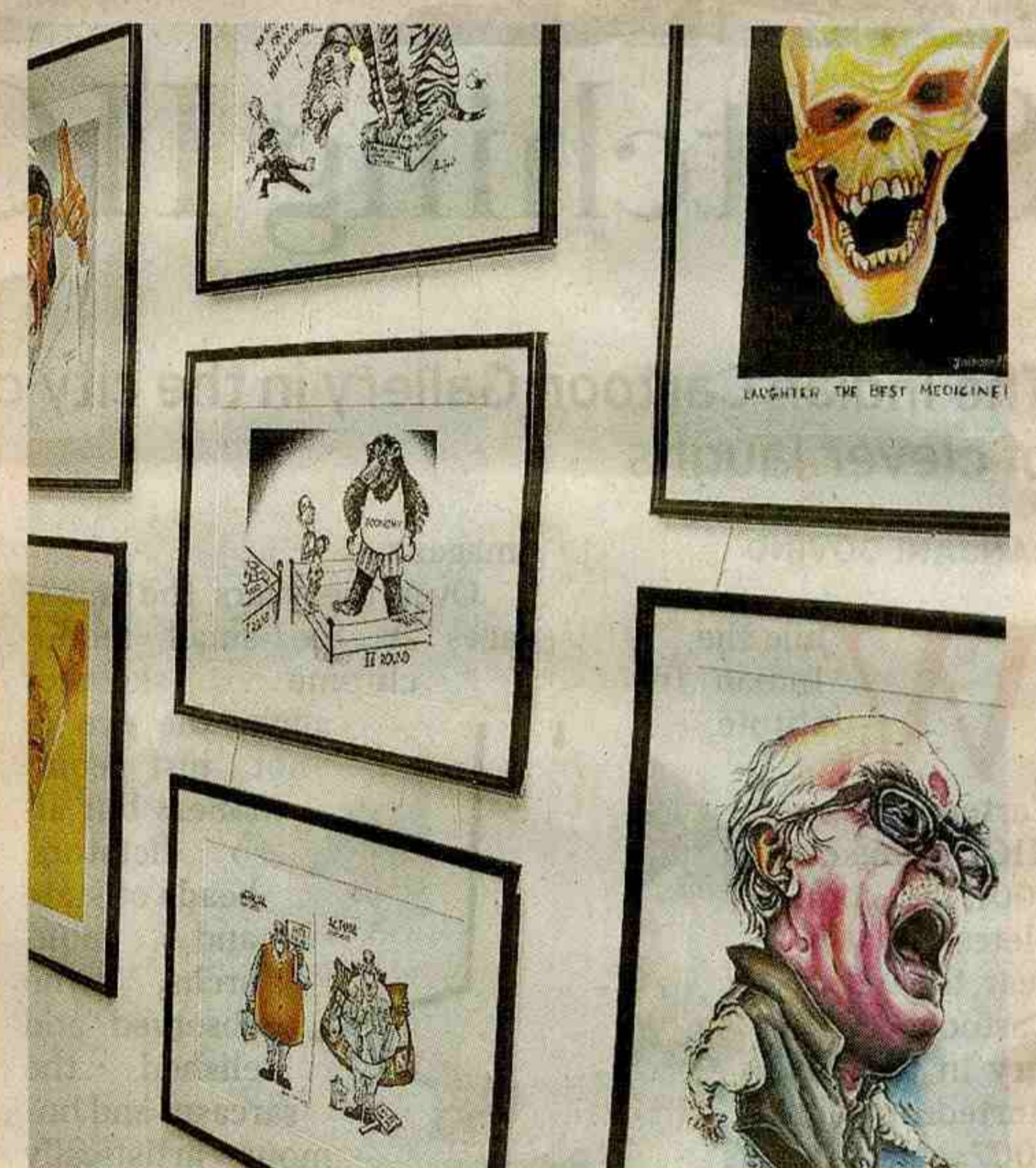
## On a different note

\* Recorded history according to IIC says the father of Indian cartooning was K. Shankar Pillai, just as the legendary David Low of World Cartooning.

\* The archives of the IIC are rich with nearly 1.5 lakh cartoon exhibits including caricatures, doodles, political and social cartoons

\* Unpublished doodles of R.K. Laxman, Mario de Miranda's sketches of Karnataka and 500 titles of books are part of the Institute's Heritage collection

\* The Institute conducts lecture demonstrations by leading cartoonists while attracting cartoons from experts around the world as U.S. U.S.S.R., China, and European countries.



BOLD MESSAGES Pointing people's follies to making digs at politicians PHOTO: BHAGYA PRAKASH K.