

POSTAL NEWS
No. 1/2008

**Formulated by UNI-Japan Post in cooperation with UNI-Apro,
ASPEK Indonesia and SPPI**

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Tamil Nadu - Chennai

1. Philatelic expo to feature rare stamps

Special Correspondent Jan 1, 2008

CHENNAI: "Penny Black," the world's first postal stamp, "Scinde Dawk," India's maiden stamp, and a set of four stamps on Mahatma Gandhi printed in Switzerland and issued by the Indian Government on the first anniversary of Independence will be among the rare stamps to be displayed at the five-day national philatelic exhibition beginning here on Wednesday.

In all, more than one lakh stamps will be on display. More than 20,000 album sheets will be mounted on 1,300 philatelic frames. Three hundred and seventy philatelists from all over the country are taking part in the exhibition, which Union Minister for Communications and Information Technology A. Raja will declare open at Rani Meyyammai and Raja Muthiah Halls off Commander-in-Chief Road.

Four stamps, portraying colourful butterflies of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands, and a book, "1857 through Indian Postage Stamps," will be released at the inauguration.

Hosted by the Tamil Nadu Postal Circle for the first time, the exhibition is organised by the department, together with the Philatelic Congress of India and the South India Philatelists Association, according to Indira Krishna Kumar, Principal Chief Postmaster- General, Tamil Nadu Circle.
Seminar

On the inaugural day, a seminar on modern trends in philately will be held. For the five days, there will be workshops for the learners, a State-level quiz for the winners of the regional-level contests, an on-the-spot painting competition for students, cultural programmes and Kavi sammelans. Special postal covers focussing on maritime, art, heritage and technology will be released.

Sales booths

Ms. Krishna Kumar said 50 sales booths of stamp dealers would be put up at the venue. An extension counter of the Philatelic Bureau of the Anna Salai Head Post Office would sell the special covers with cancellations.

On Sunday, Minister of State for Communications Shakeel Ahmad would give away awards to the winners of different contests.

The exhibition would be open to the public from 10.30 a.m. to 7 p.m. Every day, each visitor would be assured of a gift. "We would like to attract children and youth to the exhibition," Ms. Krishna Kumar said.

Since Independence, the department has issued 50 thematic stamps and 82 stamps, all relating to Tamil Nadu. The Postal Directorate has recently approved stamps on Udumalai Narayana Kavi, A.T. Panneerselvam and Thillaiyadi Valliammai, according to S. Balasundaram, officer on special duty for the national philatelic exhibition.

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2. Difficult for gold demand to top 1,000 tonnes this year

Gargi Shah

Mumbai, Jan. 1 The country's voracious appetite for gold is well known. Despite rising prices, demand in the first three quarters of 2007 increased; but when the market breached the psychological Rs 10,000 per 10 grams, there was a decline.

What will happen to Indian demand, so crucial for world gold market, in 2008? Some experts predict gold prices will easily exceed \$850 an ounce, breach \$900 and then move towards \$1,000.

Mr Ajay Mitra, Managing Director - India, World Gold Council (WGC) spoke to Business Line on the business ahead for this precious metal.

With the total gold demand recorded at 689.7 tonnes by third quarter, do you think India will have record demand numbers for the year 2007? What are the demand projections for the last quarter?

Current trends suggest annual demand of 800 tonnes for the year 2007, with about 110 tonnes demand expected for the last quarter.

We were looking at higher numbers near 1,000 tonnes given the strong first half when prices were below Rs 9000 per 10 gm.

But that was dampened because of the price escalation from September onwards.

With the projections of high prices next year, how do you see the impact on demand growth for India?

Will the rupee appreciation come to any aide?

Indian demand to reach 1,000 tonnes this year looks difficult. But factors like appreciation of the rupee to Rs 36 against a dollar or if the country were to go into election mode, that will trigger higher liquidity, much of the funds are expected to flow into buying of gold. If such conditions were to prevail then we can see some record total demand numbers.

How will the jewellery and investment demand unfold next year in view of various factors like the slowing US economy, buoyant stock market?

If the US economy does slow down there will be impact on gold demand from the jewellery industry to the extent of exports to the US. But then jewellers are expected to get aggressive in the domestic market and explore newer markets. Today, despite record imports, the per capita consumption of gold in India is less than one gram.

Generally, a portfolio would be 80:20 equity-gold respectively. Consumers buy gold to hedge their stock market risks, as gold is known survive negative factors in the markets. Thus, if equity exposure goes up, then gold exposure would also go up proportionately to take care of the dips. Investment in gold and stock markets mutually survive. Challenge for us though would be to divert the equity portfolio profits into buying gold (laughs).

With gold prices reaching 27-year high, did the market witness rise in scrap sales? Do you expect higher scrap sales next year on the backdrop of higher prices?

Scrap dealers in Zaveri Baazar have witnessed three-fold sales with the increase in prices. Scrap business works on a good 3 to 4 per cent margin and is mainly metro-centric. But given that the bullion sector in India is highly unorganised it is difficult to get exact numbers. However, scrap volumes range from 150-200 tonnes depending on volatility and price levels. If prices were to go still higher Indians may decide to sell for profit. After all, they are in possession of a good 15,000 tonnes of physical gold.

What promotion events are planned for the next year?

We are seeking to set a trend of 18-carat fashion accessories. This will enhance the image of gold and appeal to the fashion hungry urban youth. We have already tied up with Tanishq and other jewellery designers and we want to propagate this through the trendsetters Page 3-ites. The project would be launched in April.

We also did a pilot project with SBI for sale of gold coins involving 100 branches. The bank will rope in about 1000 branches for the sale of gold coins in six months time. We are planning to do a project with the Indian Postal Services for sale of gold coins through postal outlets. We have an in-principle agreement and now have to get the necessary permissions. Thereafter, WGC will facilitate the postal authorities to tie with authorised bank to procure gold.

What is the tune of investment for promotions?

There is an investment pool in which the WGC and its partners from the industry contribute towards. The pool is about Rs 71 crore this year which would double in next three years. The share of WGC is 30 per cent while the rest 70 per cent is from our partners and is mostly spent on jewellery promotions.

By the end of this decade any significant scheme you see materialising for investment in gold?

All along our focus had been on promotion of gold through jewellery. Now, we are seeking to make it more broad-based taking in investment products linked to gold. We propose to run a Gold Certificate Scheme similar to the National Savings Scheme. The corpus of the Scheme would be invested in the gold bond market in one of the developed markets like that of London, as currently there is no such market here. Even as we speak an appointment is being sought with the Reserve Bank of India for discussing the proposal with the regulatory body.

Are there expectations of gold being used as an industrial metal in India?

Current consumption by the dental and healthcare industry is about 5 tonnes. WGC London has engaged in a pilot project with FIAT, Italy to use an autocatalyst developed by California based Nanostellar. This catalyst material made with the use of gold will enable manufacturers of diesel engines to reduce noxious emissions by as much as 40 per cent. Once this is done, we will rope in some of the local majors like the Tata or Leyland for adoption of the technology. This will set a new industrial demand for the precious metal.

Hallmarking of jewellery has been protested by the jewellers across the nation. What do you think would be the outcome?

The question is not whether it will happen but the scale at which it will happen. Though initially it may be restricted and may only take off in some cities. But in the absence of hallmarking there will only be further erosion of the business, loss of consumer faith, which will eventually blow up on their face. Consumer groups will question why would the jewellery community shy away from hallmarking.

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Final deliveries made in downtown Akron

3. Beloved postman retiring

Customers enjoyed his friendly fellowship 42 years; say goodbye

By Katie Byard
Beacon Journal staff writer

Published on Tuesday, Jan 01, 2008

Nothing is more commonplace than the daily mail.

So when the person delivering it changes, it should be no big deal.

But it is when the mailman is Paul Merlo.

Merlo, who has been delivering mail for 42 years in Akron, began saying goodbye last week.

On Monday, the 66-year-old made his final deliveries downtown.

"I can't think of any other time in my life when I looked forward to getting my mail," said Carolyn Hanson, a manager at Superior Staffing in the Quaker Square complex, on Friday.

Along with the mail, Merlo has delivered "a good sense of irony and reality," Hanson said.

Merlo has walked a downtown route for 27 years. He had planned to be an industrial arts teacher but found his bliss being a dependable part of people's daily lives.

He first donned a uniform in April 1966, when Lyndon Johnson was president, stamps were 5 cents and letter carriers had to wear hats. The U.S. Postal Service handled fewer than 85 billion pieces of mail. Today, it handles more than 200 billion.

Word that Merlo was hanging up his mailbag for good has been around for a while.

But as Merlo's retirement grew closer last week, the news was hitting home. Patrons mourned the imminent loss of their daily fellowship with him.

"We talk about business, the economy," said Superior Staffing administrative assistant Peggy Kinney, her eyes tearing up.

"We solve the world problems."

Merlo also addressed smaller issues, endearing himself to his patrons.

He always placed the People magazine on top of the stack for Courtney Akers, a receptionist in a Quaker Square law office. That way, she could snag it before others did.

"I'm going on strike as of next year," she said jokingly Friday.

"I see him more than my dad," said Jamie Grippi, a receptionist in another Quaker Square law office.

Lynne Earhart, an attorney at the company, said, "I don't know who is going to replace him. I'm a little worried."

Mail frequently is addressed to clients of the law firm. And the firm has switched offices within Quaker Square. Yet Merlo always managed to get the mail to the right place, Earhart said.

The length of Merlo's tenure is unusual. Many letter carriers retire after 20 to 30 years, said David Van Allen, spokesman for the Postal Service in northern Ohio. Merlo's long career was noted in a proclamation issued by Mayor Don Plusquellic that declared Monday "Paul Merlo Day."

The Akron resident maximized his pension by putting in 42 years. He'll get about 80 percent of his annual salary.

His wife, Karen, said he is "very practical."

"I hadn't gotten to a point of being bored," Merlo said.

After serving with the U.S. Army Reserves, Merlo was working at a local appliance repair company in 1965 when he took the required postal service test. A parcel carrier, who delivered to the business, suggested Merlo take the exam.

Merlo already had decided that teaching drafting was not for him and had quit college.

"You were kind of on your own," as a letter carrier, he said.

"You do your route, and meet people on the route. It was almost like you were self-employed."

Today he feels less on his own. As the postal service looks to save money, there's more attention paid to delivery times and the structure of routes, he said.

"Your eight-hour day is tighter than it used to be," leaving little time to speak with patrons, he said.

However, he still made the time. "People just open up to you. Sometimes they make your day if you're having a bad day," Merlo said Monday.

"I never dreamed I'd be here for 42 years," Merlo told fellow postal service workers at a brief retirement party Friday at the Five Points post office in West Akron. "I took it one year at a time. That's how I got here."

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4. Internet and postal marketing should be complementary

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) should use internet and postal marketing in a "complementary way", say industry experts.

The Institute of Direct Marketing has advised SMEs to combine internet, direct mail and other marketing mediums for maximum effectiveness.

James A Matthewson, who founded marketing consultancy My Digital JAM Limited and is a tutor for the Institute of Direct Marketing, made the claims.

He said: "SMEs should note that local radio campaigns can drive people to search on Google, so whilst running ads on the radio, they should also have ads on search engines.

"Integration of marketing is key – testing channels to identify what they do best is a smart way to approach it – for SMEs, it's all about profit, so ensuring their activity delivers a positive return on investment is key."

Mr Matthewson added that with emerging internet channels such as local search and mobile internet coming into the mainstream in 2008, low-cost digital channels will open up to SME businesses.

A recent survey by International Communications Research found that 73 per cent of respondents would be happy to receive marketing information via postal mail, compared to just 18 per cent for email.

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