

it's friday!

The famous Brit photographer's visual biography captures some very candid moments with Indian celebrities

# INDIANS AS VIEWED BY SNOWDON

**A**NTONY CHARLES Robert Armstrong-Jones, 1st Earl of Snowdon, has as many professions as names. The Emmy Award-winning English documentary filmmaker is also an architect and an inventor and was once married to Princess Margaret, Queen Elizabeth's younger sister — but not least of his many claims to fame is his body of photography work. Lord Snowdon is now the force behind an exhibition and book of portraits, both titled *India by Snowdon*.

The exhibition and the book have been produced by the Nand and Jeet Khemka Foundation in association with PhotoInk. The exhibition features portraits of Indians who have, in some ways, shaped and influenced modern India — it spans politicians such as Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Delhi Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit and former Defence Minister George Fernandes; actors such as Rekha, Aishwarya Rai Bachchan and Naseeruddin Shah; dancers such as the late Chandralekha and Malvika Sarukkai; business people such as Infosys founder N R Narayana Murthy and FabIndia founders Bimla and son, William Bissell. But when you have shot pretty much everyone on the planet, including the royal family, actors Marlene Dietrich and Charlie Chaplin and playwright Tom Stoppard, these names, perhaps, wouldn't sound as imposing. The book, features essays by ICCR president and MP, Dr. Karan Singh, former Union Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar, historians Romila Thapar and Rudrangshu Mukherjee and activist Teesta Setalvad among others.



by **Karanjeet Kaur**

The biographies of all the subjects have been written by Malvika Singh. According to Devika Dault-Singh of PhotoInk, who is also the project director, the entire project has taken close to five years and involved a great deal of travelling by Lord Snowdon — a triumph, because he is afflicted with childhood polio, which has only gotten worse with time. One of the first things that you notice about the exhibition, is that it is a visual biography of an India that has, to cite an over-used cliché, been at the cusp of

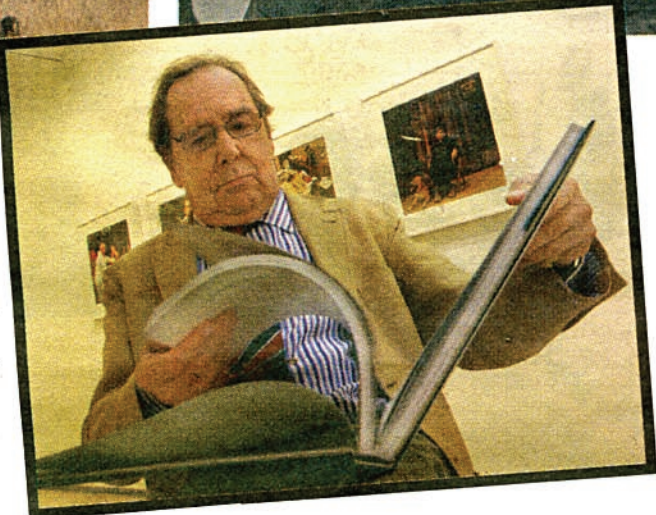
history. The second thing that you notice, is how there is a complete absence of a desire to exoticise India. True, these are just portraits, but there's no *ghat* of Varanasi or an elephant in the background. Singh says that there was a conscious effort to keep these tropes out and reserve the exhibition to exclusive portraits. "You don't need a Snowdon to capture those other things," she says. It comes as no surprise then that these exclusive pictures are not on sale — only the sitters get their hands on a

signed print. One of the most compelling photographs of the exhibition is a picture of George Fernandes, lying on his bed, his dog stretched out next to him. According to photographer Dylan Thomas, who assisted Snowdon on the project, Fernandes had just returned from campaigning for the Bihar elections and was extremely tired and requested for a brief shut-eye. His dog came and lay down on



**The exhibition and the book, India by Snowdon, assiduously stays away from a desire to exoticise India**

and before the doors opened. Vijay Mallya, Chairman of the United Breweries Group and Kingfisher Airlines was asked to remove his shoes and pose barefoot because his extravagant shoes proved to be too much of a distraction. These and many such stories populate the exhibition. It is an important memoir of an ever-changing India. Take a look before it changes again. — India By Snowdon opens on Friday at PhotoInk, MGF Hyundai Building, 1, Faiz Road, and continues till January 30. The gallery remains open on all days between 11 am and 7 pm, except Sundays.



**1.** George Fernandes catches up on sleep after hectic election campaigning; **2.** Actor Kamal Haasan poses next to a life-size portrait of Charlie Chaplin; **3.** Jammu & Kashmir chief minister Omar Abdullah poses with his pet dog. **4.** The quintessential Lalu Prasad picture, as he milks a cow in his backyard. (Left) The photographer sifts through his book, *India by Snowdon*.