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## WHAT SUP

### STARMARK'S FIRST-EVER PEN FEST BEGINS AT SOUTH CITY MALL TODAY. t2 GETS YOU A SNEAK PEEK

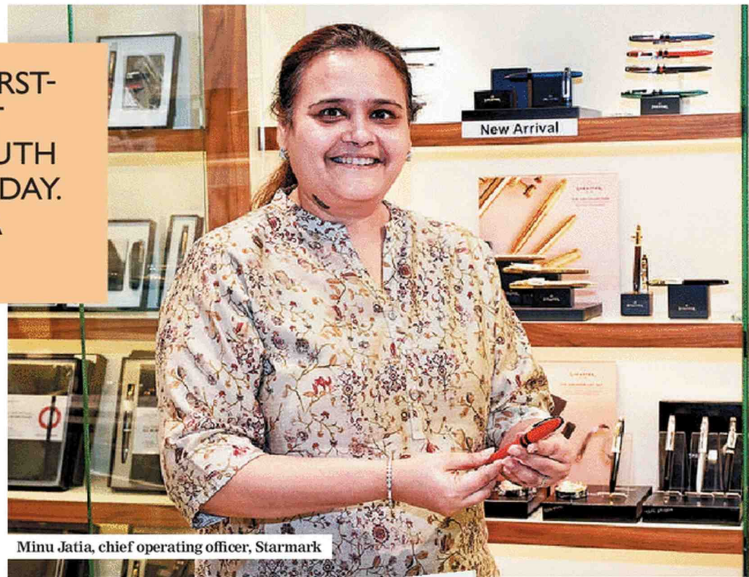
In a new and exciting venture, Starmark, South City Mall, is set to host the brand's first-ever Pen Fest, which starts today and will continue until June 23. This unique event promises to be a haven for pen enthusiasts and collectors and will showcase over 25,000 pens, inks, and accessories from more than 50 international brands. Renowned brands like Cross, Parker, Lamy, Sheaffer, Fisher Space, Sailor, Waterman, Pelikan, and others will be available. This inaugural Starmark Pen Fest is a must-visit for anyone passionate about writing. Attendees can look forward to enlightening sessions, workshops, and a unique opportunity to explore the world of fine writing instruments.

t2 caught up for a chat with Minu Jatia, chief operating officer of Starmark, to know more.

#### Tell us a little about the fest. What can guests expect?

It starts on June 14 and will go on till June 23rd. Starmark is lucky in its 25th year, and we have always conducted a lot of book-related excursions. And we've had all sorts of brands for writing instruments right from our inception, too. So, we thought, why not do a fest this time, an exhibition of all the brands we can lay our hands on? We're hosting a robust collection of about 50-60 international brands who will be displaying their pens at the fest, and also brands that are made purely in India. And there'll be full-fledged bouquets of all these pens - whether they're fountain pens, roller balls, ball pens, pencils, inks of different varieties - we'll have about 20 different brands of inks - and we're also planning to launch ink stations, which will be inaugurated by (hand lettering and calligraphy expert) K.C. Janardhan and (author) Shirshenduda (Mukhopadhyay).

We've also sent letters to some schools in the city because I personally would like the younger generation to come and explore these pens. Back in my day, it was mandatory for us to write with fountain pens but I don't think kids these days do that anymore. So we're trying to reach out to the children to get them as involved as we can. And we've got some special offers for them. For example, if a student brings along their ID card, they'll be subject to a special price-point offer... because kids don't get too



Minu Jatia, chief operating officer, Starmark

pick up a pen regardless of what stage they're at.

#### What was the process that went into choosing these particular brands?

We pulled up a list and categorised a premium brand range, a mid-market brand range, and an economical brand range. We wanted to make sure there was something that suited everyone. Every pocket and every taste, because the pen is a very personal accessory. And we're still reaching out to some brands, so it's been quite an exploratory journey for us as well. For example, I came across this young boy who made his first pen when he was 17, for a school project! Can you imagine? And that made me so happy because the interest is still there, people just don't know where to find it. So yeah, it's been quite a journey and my team and I are enjoying ourselves very much. But we've never done this before, so we're quite nervous!

#### Would you say the experience of organising this fest has been one of personal growth for you?

Definitely. I feel words have the power to change lives, and the written word more so than anything else. And the younger generation has now moved towards digitalisation so much that they do not know of the power of the written word because the written word has to be thought of before you write. It is not easily erasable. When one writes on an iPad, it's so easy to erase something, but on paper, it's very different. And kids these days are more impulsive, and compulsive - they think after they have acted. So, I think if they begin to start writing with pens, somewhere psychologically there might be changes in the way they lead their lives, which is very important. The world is going too fast! We need to slow down. And slowing down means taking the time to think and then write, rather than writing and then regretting. And I really do think there is no better way than gifting these children a pen to make them explore and understand the world around them better. And, of course, since we are a bookstore, I wanted this first step to be through pens and writing because books and pens go hand-in-hand. There's a lot to be learned about the world, and about oneself, by the act of putting pen to paper, and I hope this fest will help a lot of people realise that.

**Subhalakshmi Dey**  
Pictures: Pabitra Das

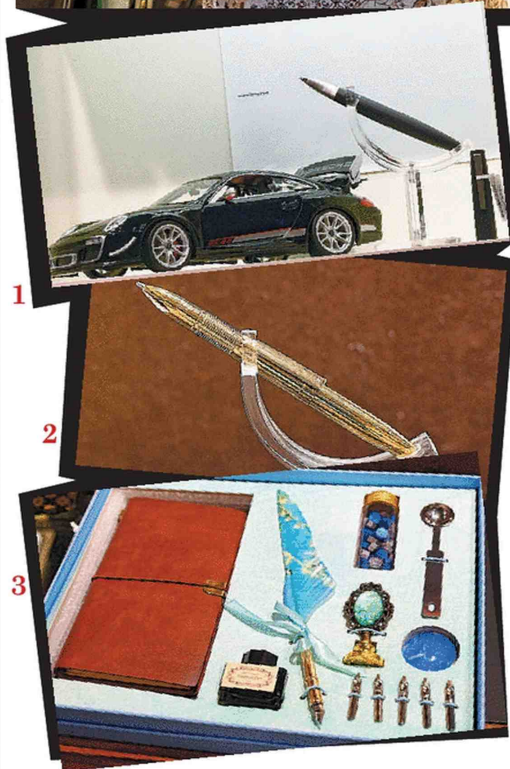
much pocket money! So if they bring their card and pick up a pen they like, we could come up with ways to let them have it for a student-pocket-friendly budget.

We'll be hosting tons of other things, too, like interesting workshops with some brand-sponsored prizes. Another is a calligraphy workshop, and K.C. Janardhan will also be hosting a session, but that one's more for the veterans, I should think. Some brands like Cross will be organising loyalty schemes - if you bring your Cross pen to the fest and want to buy another Cross product, they will give you a free refill. Lamy will set up a service centre in the store, Sheaffer will exhibit some of their vintage pens... I could go on and on! But yeah, there's a lot to look forward to.

#### What would you say was the main inspiration behind hosting this fest? It's the first of its kind for Starmark, we believe...

Yes, that's right. Personally, I've always believed that Calcutta is a city of art and culture. So, it makes sense to host a pen fest here. I came to Calcutta when I got married 30 years ago, and one of the first things I noticed was that everyone carried a pen in their pocket. And even in today's digital world, I see a lot of people still writing with pens! So, it's definitely a Calcutta connect.

Another thing I wanted to do was to expose this vast world of writing instruments to people who may not have had access to them before. Not everyone travels or is able to, and some brands are specific to certain regions and unavailable in others. That was also one of the main thoughts that went into this; getting all these brands under one roof so everyone can come together - customers and collectors, kids and adults. And not just them. Anybody who is just starting on their pen journey, anyone who's interested... we're hoping the fest will inspire them to



- 1 The pen in the photo is a Lamy 2000 with a 14k solid gold hooded nib and piston-filling mechanism. The body is made of fibreglass polycarbonate.
- 2 This is a Fisher Space zero-gravity pen, which can also be used underwater as well as upside down, unlike other pens. It comes with an 80-year guarantee!
- 3 This beautiful calligraphy box comes with a bound journal, a faux-feather quill pen that allows interchangeable nibs, an ink pot, a wax seal kit with wax beads, and a Van Gogh-esque seal stamp.