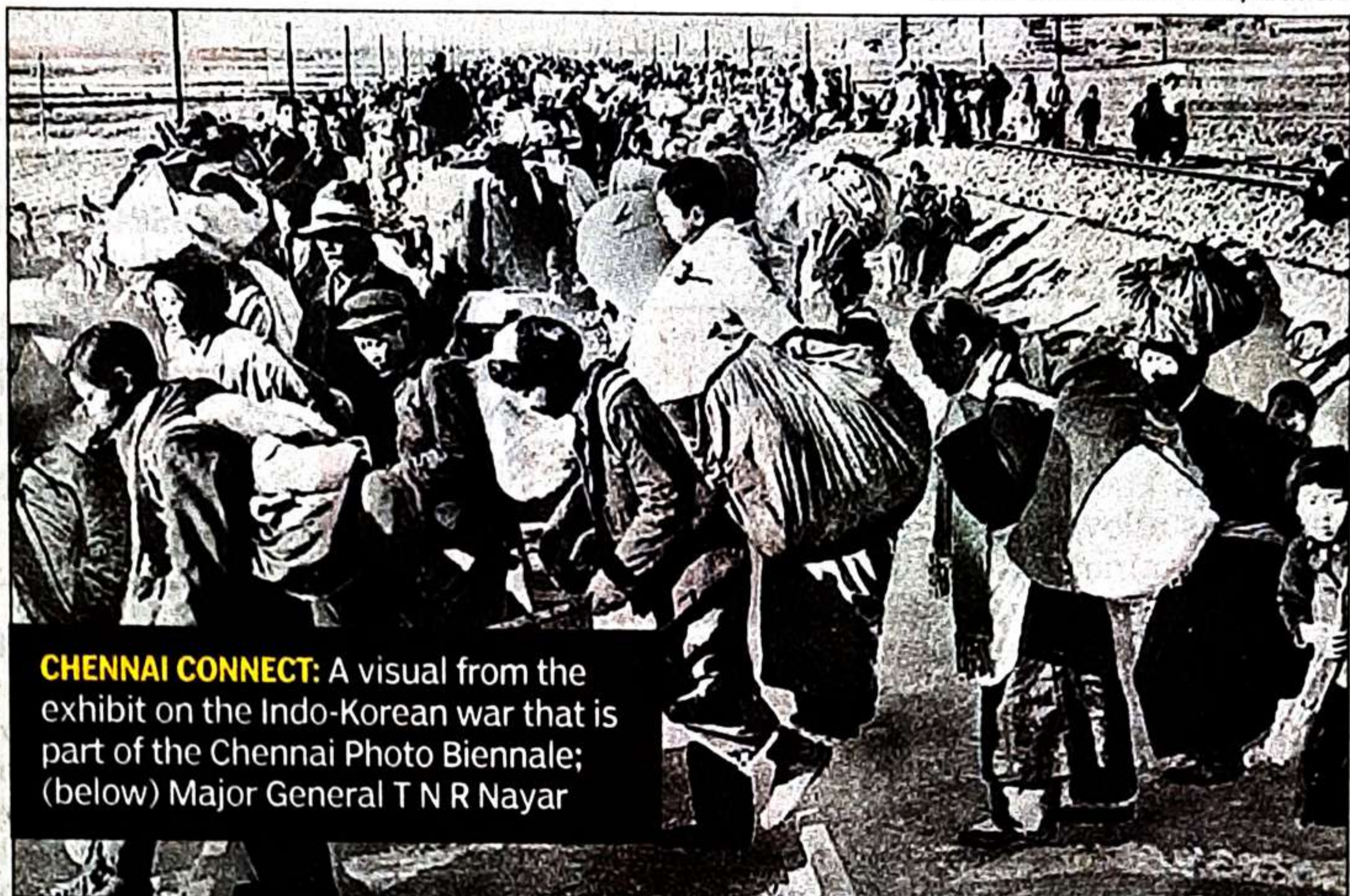


REMEMBERING THE FORGOTTEN WAR

Pic credit: US Defense Department



CHENNAI CONNECT: A visual from the exhibit on the Indo-Korean war that is part of the Chennai Photo Biennale; (below) Major General T N R Nayar

Kamini.Mathai@timesgroup.com

“Oh my goodness, that’s my grandfather,” exclaimed Rathi Jafer, during the unveiling of ‘Chicken Run’, a photo-narrative, which captures a powerful yet little-remembered slice of Indo-Korean history from the 1950s.

The exhibit, created by Chennai-based artist Parvathi Nayar and her niece Nayantara Nayar, a storyteller, for the Chennai Photo Biennale III, is inspired by the artist’s father, late Major General T N R Nayar, who travelled to Korea, along with General Thorat as part of the Custodian Force of India, which was deployed for several months from 1953-54 towards the end of the Korean War to help decide the fate of Prisoners of War who did not want to be repatriated home. Major General Nayar went on the CFI’s reconnaissance of Korea.

The ships carrying the CFI set sail from Chennai and returned after the mission to a grand welcome at the port by then chief minister of Madras C Rajagopalachari. Rathi’s grandfather, Ramunni Menon, then chief secretary of the Madras Presidency, is seen in one of the videos greeting members of the CFI on their return from Korea in 1953. “I spotted my grandmother too, serving jalebis to the troops,” says Rathi, director of the Indo-Korean Cultural and Information Centre (Inko) in Chennai.

“My father left his personal videos, papers, and memorabilia to me, which



was the original inspiration for the project as well as feature in it,” says Parvathi. The exhibition is part of a larger storytelling project ‘Limits of Change’ commissioned by InKo Centre, is slated to take place as a physical art installation and storytelling experience in the future.

Chicken Run also uses photo collections sourced from The Peabody Library and the Pepperdine Collection as well as Parvathi’s fresh photographs to tell the fictitious story of a Korean prisoner of war who returns to India and later takes up chicken farming in Chennai.

“The Korean War is often referred to as the ‘Forgotten War’ and many aspects including India’s role in it as peacekeepers seem to be largely forgotten, which is why we wanted to capture this aspect of it. There is a record of prisoners of war returning to India and some of them taking up chicken farming,” says Parvathi. “Although we used a fictive narrative to weave together the exhibition, most of the video footage used has been filmed by my father in the Korean demilitarized zone and in Chennai,” she says.

The themes of Chicken Run — war, sustainability, immigration — continue to remain relevant. “History should not be a story of victors, but the accounts of people who have lived through these times,” says Parvathi, who believes fiction inspired by history can tell the truest stories. The exhibit can be viewed at chennaiphotobiennale.com.

Pick of the week

Virtual tours, workshops,
and other events you just
can't miss



VR, PoW and chickens

The **Chennai Photo Biennale's** third edition, *Maps of Disquiet*, will continue its digital exhibitions till the end of the month. Don't miss *A Land of Stories*, a student showcase launching on February 26 at the Government Museum. At **InKo Centre**, *Chicken Run* shares an unusual story of war. The fictional photo-narrative by artist Parvathi Nayar and playwright Nayantara Nayar follows Mr H through his imprisonment as a Korean PoW to setting up a chicken farm in Madras in the 1950s.
[@chennaiphotobiennale](#)