

Handicraft expo, artisans' meet inaugurated

CORRESPONDENT

MANGALDAI, May 4 – Darrang Deputy Commissioner, Manoj Kumar on Saturday afternoon inaugurated an eight-day-long district-level handicraft expo and artisans meet, organised by the District Industries and Commerce Centre (DICC) at the Youth Club here.

The Deputy Commissioner, expressed dissatisfaction over the indifferent attitude of the youths to avail benefits of government schemes for self-employment under various government departments. At the same time, he urged them to come forward to raise their justified demands before the Government.

Earlier, explaining the objectives of the programme, Biswajit Das, GM, DICC, Darrang said that it is aimed at pro-

moting the local handicraft and handloom products and to provide a platform for 30 selected artisans to display their products conceived of innovative ideas with a view to encourage their creativity. He also announced a total cash prize of Rs 62,000 for eight selected participating artisans.

The expo which will end on May 9 has many stalls filled with eye-catching handicraft products including products made of handmade paper, water hyacinth, cane and bamboo, handloom, processed foods etc.

In the inaugural function, Lead District Manager (LDM), Sadhan Sutradhar, Director, UCO Rural Self Employment Training Institute (RSETI) Kushal Saharia, officials and staff of DICC, artisans, entrepreneurs, a section of the local people and media persons were present.

Polyester sector expects better year

VINAY UMARJI

Ahmedabad, 6 May

After tough competition from cotton last year, the manmade yarn and fabric industry is expected to grow at a higher rate of five to seven per cent in 2015-16, on the back of stable crude oil prices. However, it is the domestic market that will see the larger growth, as Indian synthetic yarn and fabric performance has not been one of the best internationally.

So, while companies in the segment are not expecting much from exports, the domestic market might bring back some sheen, they say. "While normal growth of five to seven per cent is anticipated, if the economy does well, this could go up to double-digit growth," said O P Lohia, chairman, Indo Rama Synthetics (India) Ltd.

In 2014-15, demand for most manmade filament & fibre was subdued due to a decline in prices of cotton yarn. Also, says a report, the levy in July 2014 of anti-dumping

duty on import of purified terephthalic acid (PTA), a major input, further hit domestic production of polyester filament yarn.

Unlike the seasonality for cotton, synthetic textile products can be produced through the year. Also, there is expected to be more consumer demand for woven and non-woven synthetic textiles, and the industry anticipates equal growth in the synthetic yarn and fabric market in both segments, said Sanjay Jain, managing director of TT Ltd and vice-president, Federation of



Stable crude prices and higher domestic demand are reasons for better prospects

Hosiery Manufacturers Association of India.

Demand recovery for manmade filament, fibre, yarn and fabric in 2015-16 is likely to be backed by an increase in offtake by apparel manufacturers, says a CMIE report. The

apparel segment consumes a little more than half of the total synthetic fibre produced by the industry. Manufacturers of home textiles and technical textiles are also expected to increase the usage of synthetic fibres during the year. Also, with crude oil prices expected to remain stable, PTA and mono-ethylene glycol prices are likely to come down, too, leading to a decline in polyester prices by eight to 12 per cent this year. Domestic and international prices of both the polyester raw materials had plunged in the latter half of 2014-15, led by a steep decline in crude oil prices. So, polyester prices had corrected sharply during the period.

"This year, however, crude oil prices are

expected to remain stable at \$60-70 a barrel. Also, market demand for polyester is likely to rise by five to seven per cent," said Jyotiprasad Chiripal, director at Chiripal Group, which has a polyester yarn manufacturing capacity of 200 tonnes a day.

But, exports could play spoilsport this year. "With markets like Brazil, Turkey and Egypt under pressure for several reasons, demand for polyester yarn and fabric will be under pressure this year. Also, under the government's new import/export policy, while there is a push for polyester exports, almost all forms of exemptions have been removed, making polyester exports uncompetitive," Lohia added.

Promoters' shares pledging rises 28% in FY15

BS REPORTER

Mumbai, 6 May

Pledging of shares by promoters of listed companies rose nearly 30 per cent in 2014-15. According to a report from Prime Database, the value of pledged shares moved up to ₹1.94 lakh-crore against ₹1.52 lakh-crore the previous financial year. With this, 43 per cent of total promoter holding was pledged. Last year, the percentage had been 42 per cent.

Cairn India, Adani Enterprises, Tata Consultancy Services, JSW Energy, Asian Paints and Adani Power are among those with pledged shares. The value of such shares in Cairn India alone is ₹15,801 crore, while that of Adani Enterprises and Tata Consultancy is ₹8,000 crore and ₹7,300 crore, respectively.

Share pledging is typically done by promoters to raise funds, either in the same company or for financing other projects. While the rise can be partly explained by rising stock prices, it has also risen in terms of percentage of promoter holding. Pranav Haldea, managing director of Prime Database, says: "It was expected that promoters' pledged stakes would come down as higher share prices would create enough comfort zones for lenders. However, this has not happened. Ironically, the need for promoters to pledge their shares should have been high in 2012-13 and 2013-14, when many companies were

cash-strapped and finances were difficult to raise."

The total of promoter holding pledged has been increasing over recent years. In 2010, it was 29 per cent. High pledge levels are typically not considered a good sign by investors, as a downturn in the market price can lead to invocation and change in management. As many as 25 companies had the complete holding (100 per cent) of the promoters under pledge as on March 31, 2015.

These include AGC Networks, Ankit Metal & Power, Bajaj Hindusthan Sugar, DQ Entertainment (International), Eastern Silk Industries, Era Infra Engineering, Gokaldas Exports and IL&FS Investment Managers, among others.

In all, there were 200 companies in which 50 per cent of the promoters' shareholding was pledged and 77 in which 90 per cent of the promoters' shareholding was pledged. The top 10 companies here were Bajaj Hindusthan Sugar; AGC Networks; DQ Entertainment; IVRCL; Rohit Ferro-Tech; Servalakshmi Paper; Arvind Remedies (all from 0 to 100 percent); Burnpur Cement (0 to 90 per cent); Entegra (0 to 86 per cent); and, Consolidated Construction Consortium (0 to 83 per cent). Overall, there were 206 companies in which the percentage of promoter holding pledged increased in this period.

The total promoters' holding pledged has been increasing over the past few years. In 2010, it stood at 29 per cent

Textile exports rise just 1.7% up to Feb, way short of 15% target

■ Exports for '14-15 are likely to be lower than even 5% growth expected until recently

Banikinkar Pattanayak
New Delhi, May 6

INDIA'S overall textile and garment exports grew just 1.7% during the April-February period of the last fiscal from a year before, while imports have risen by 14.2% during the period, according to the latest official data.

The overall textile and garment exports—which also include those of jute, coir, handicrafts and handloom items—will not just miss the initial official growth target of 15% for 2014-15 but also fall short of the 5% expansion rate expected until recently. According to the provisional data, the overall textile and garment exports touched \$35.29 billion during the April-February, compared with \$34.72 billion a year before. The government had initially set the export target at \$45 billion for 2014-15, compared with the actual exports of \$39.3 billion in the previous fiscal.

Exports of fibres crashed over 36% up to February last fiscal, while some other textile items witnessed just a

Weft & warp							
EXPORTS (In \$ mn)	Apr-Feb FY14	Apr-Feb FY15	% change	IMPORTS (In \$ mn)	Apr-Feb FY14	Apr-Feb FY15	% change
Fibres	3,965.77	2,521.98	-36.4	Fibres	1,104.79	1,335.15	20.9
Textiles	14,103.41	14,163.76	0.4	Textiles	2,694.41	2,982.36	10.7
Garments	13,462.93	15,262.27	13.4	Garments	403.66	485.87	20.4
Handicrafts etc	2,601.21	2,772.75	6.6	Handicrafts etc	507.43	586.56	15.6
Jute & products	235.18	222.36	-5.5	Jute & products	146.66	169.62	15.7
Handloom	346.52	343.31	-0.9	Handloom	17.58	8.67	-50.7
Grand total	34,715.02	35,286.43	1.7	Grand total	4,874.53	5,568.23	14.2
Sources: DGCIS, CITI							

0.4% rise, thanks primarily to a slowdown in top buyer China, according to industry executives. The communist neighbour usually accounts for over 70% of India's cotton and 40% of yarn supplies. Consequently, exports of raw cotton, including waste, dropped almost 47% during the April-February period from a year before (See table). The only major growth driver has been the garment segment, with a 13.4% rise between April and February from a year earlier.

"The textile industry needs some incentives to export products to countries such as Bangladesh, Viet-

nam and Cambodia. These countries import textile items in large volumes for converting them into finished products such as garments for subsequent exports, so we can capture these markets more effectively with some government help," said DKNair, the secretary-general of the Confederation of the Indian Textile Industry. He added that currently domestic textile exporters are given a 2% export incentive for outbound shipments only to the US, the EU, Canada and Japan—the markets where the appetite is far more for garments than for textiles.

Imports of textiles, how-

ever, went up to \$5.57 billion between April and February, compared with \$4.87 billion a year before. However, Nair said since most of the items imported are used as inputs for finished goods, the situation isn't alarming yet.

However, despite the recognition of the textile sector's role in the Make in India concept as well as in jobs creation, with the Ajay Shankar-led panel envisaging annual outbound shipments worth \$300 billion by 2024-25, a lack of adequate focus and proper planning in boosting exports have also taken a toll, textile industry executives had said earlier. The government is yet

to come up with the textile vision document, which was to be based on the recommendations of the Ajay Shankar panel, even ten months after the report was first submitted with the textile ministry.

Subdued textile export demand has reflected in the industrial production data as well. According to the index of industrial production data, the textile segment grew just 2.4% from the April-February period from a year before.

Higher textile exports augur well for the economy as they accounted for 12.6% of the overall exports last fiscal and the sector employs 35 million people, having become the largest employer after agriculture.

The country's textile and apparel exports have expanded at an average of 11% over 10 years through 2013-14, still lagging the growth rates achieved by some much smaller nations. Even Vietnam could achieve a peak export growth rate of 30% while Bangladesh could achieve a growth rate of 18% during this period.

बुनकर कानून में संशोधन

पर पीछे हटी सरकार

नई दिल्ली (ब्यूरो)। हैंडलूम उत्पादन कानून में संशोधन के प्रस्ताव पर राज्य सरकार, गैर सरकारी संगठन व अन्य लोगों के जबरदस्त विरोध को देखते हुए आखिरकार सरकार को झुकना पड़ा। सरकार ने अब हैंडलूम उत्पादन को लेकर वर्ष 1985 में बनाए गए कानून में कोई संशोधन नहीं करने का फैसला किया है। इस बारे में बुधवार को सरकार की तरफ से स्पष्टीकरण जारी किया गया।

Serendipity of handicraft

A MEGA SHOW OF INDIAN HANDICRAFT ALSO PROVIDED AN OUTLET FOR THE ARTISANS TO MEET BUYERS FROM ABROAD, REPORTS MONICA AGARWAL

In a combination of skill and tradition, a recent handicraft exposition showcased the best of artisans from across the country. A wide range of handicrafts produced all over India in the form of art metal ware, wood-en art ware, imitation/fashion jewellery, hand printed textiles, embroidered goods, marble and soft stone crafts, lace and lace craft, paper mache articles and artistic leather goods mesmerised visitors to the Home Expo India 2015, organised by the Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH).

The three-day mega show, from 16-18 April at the India Expo Centre and Mart in Greater Noida, consisted of three business to business (B2B) shows covering all major segments of modern home ~ Indian Houseware and Decorative Show, Indian furnishings, Flooring and Textiles Show and Indian Furniture and Accessories Show.

More than 500 manufacturers and exporters from all over India participated in this expo, which provided a platform to the artisans, manufacturers and exporters of handicraft and handloom. The objective of the exhibition was to help the artisans explore the international markets for their

products and provide them with an opportunity to interact directly with the overseas buyers.

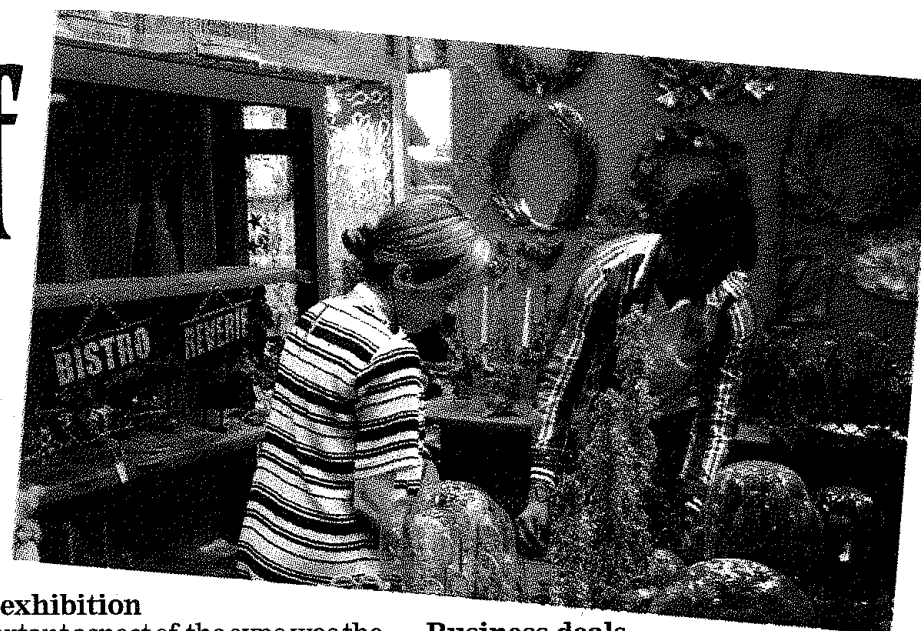
"I really love the different kinds of products in the exhibition," said a buyer from the US. "This is all so fascinating that the goods are handmade and yet so beautiful. Clothes, furniture and housing decorative steal the show in the expo."

Indian handicraft

India is one of the most important suppliers of handicraft articles in the world market. Handicraft being a labour-intensive sector, provides livelihood opportunity to skilled and talented artisans and workers. It is thus economically important in a country like India, with a repository of talent and skill. Recognising this, the EPCH expo provided an opportunity to the artisans and craftsmen by setting up a ready market for sale of their products.

EPCH helps in the development and promotion of seven million crafts persons, who are the backbone of the Indian handicrafts industry, possessing inherent skills, techniques and craftsmanship.

Home Expo India 2015 focused on important product categories of handicraft exports in order to attract the attention of international buyers besides wholesalers, distributors, retail chains, merchandisers and interior designers from India and abroad. The expo was a complete sourcing destination for textiles, home furnishings and furniture handcrafted in traditional and custom-made designs.



Thematic exhibition

An important aspect of the expo was the thematic exhibition of handicraft products developed by artisans of Scheduled Caste category with craftsmen from mega clusters in Lucknow, Bareilly and Bhuj. The artisans hailed from the untapped group of craftsmen of the country to display products like house ware, decorative items, gifts, Christmas décor, incense sticks, housing textiles, fashion accessories, cane and bamboo accessories.

Another major highlight of the expo was the special pavilion for the four North-East states ~ Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Sikkim. Products from Assam included sitalpith, brass and bell metal works, cane and bamboo artifacts, furniture, handlooms, muga and mulberry silk textiles, while Meghalaya displayed musical instruments and ornaments. Nagaland participated through its traditional products in basketry, jewellery, shell beads and floorings while woollen carpets with traditional motifs and handmade paper articles stole the show in the Sikkim section.

"The exhibition has provided such a great opportunity to me to sell my products and work to a huge market with foreign clients as well," said an exhibitor from Nagaland. "This is the first time I am selling my goods in an exhibition. It will help me to expand my market so that my goods get recognition across the world."

Business deals

The objective of Home Expo India 2015 was to generate business deals for direct import as also for tie-ups, collaborations, alliances and joint ventures for product development, product innovation and international sales of handicrafts in India. Conventionally, the US, Canada, European countries like the UK, France, Italy and Switzerland as well as the UAE and Japan have been major markets for the export of handicrafts from India. EPCH is in negotiations with the Middle East and Latin American countries as well to sell Indian handicraft.

Despite the existence of production base and a large number of craftsmen, Indian handicrafts industry has not been able to explore the existing opportunities due to lack of adequate infrastructure and market exposure. Interacting with the exhibitors after inaugurating the expo, Santosh Kumar Gangwar, Union minister of state for textiles appreciated EPCH's efforts. EPCH officials felt it was high time for Indian handicrafts industry to adopt changing designs, patterns, product development, innovations and change in production facilities for a variety of material, production techniques and related expertise to achieve a leadership position in the fast growing competition with countries like China, Korea and Thailand.

Killing it softly?

Venu Vasudevan's abrupt transfer from the post of National Museum's Director-General raises questions about the government's approach towards culture

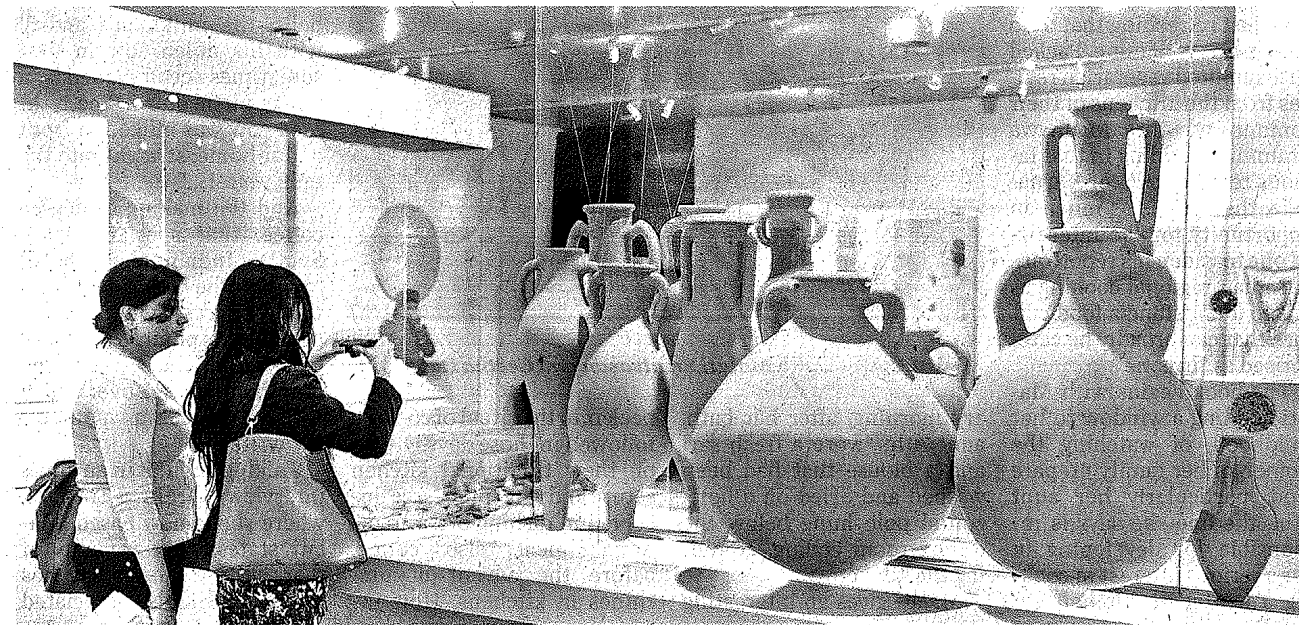
SHAILAJA TRIPATHI

These are, for sure, not so *achhe din* for the world of culture in India. Sample this: In its first budget after coming to power in 2014, the BJP government announced the setting up of Hastkala Academy in the premises of Crafts Museum. Even as the Ministry of Textiles proclaims on its website that the Academy would be set up at the Crafts Museum premises, without dismantling any of the Museum galleries and without disturbing Museum activities, Crafts Museum's future seems bleak. The museum was under much-needed renovation which has been stopped and it is headless once again. Its last director Ruchira Ghosh's tenure ended in April 2015.

* While a lot of people would have appreciated Dipali Khanna's tenure as Member-Secretary, Indira Gandhi National Centre of Arts (IGNCA), continuing for second term to carry on with her mission to revitalise the institution, all she got was an extension of six months. She finished her term on March 31, 2015. IGNCA is also headless, once again.

* Kalyan Kumar Chakravarty was to head the apex body of visual arts in the country, Lalit Kala Akademi (LKA), till 2017, as its Chairperson but he was removed all of a sudden, last month, shocking every well-wisher of the Akademi. It is believed he was in the process of cleaning up the institution and freeing it of corruption and inertia.

And now another performer's fate has been decided which is the biggest shocker



ART OF THE MATTER Visitors at the National Museum; Venu Vasudevan PHOTO: S.SUBRAMANIAM

of them all. Venu Vasudevan, the man who successfully accomplished the task of turning around National Museum — Delhi's biggest but dullest museum — is being transferred to Sports Ministry. He was to head the institution till December 2016. Poornima Sardana, a former volunteer

In protest

Lalit Kala Akademi's cause has also been espoused on different fronts. While on the one hand artists have moved the High Court questioning the removal of its Chairperson Kalyan Chakravarty and its take over by the Government, on another, former bureaucrat, poet and author Ashok Vajpeyi has filed an online petition protesting the random move.

with the Yuva Saathi Programme of National Museum, has started an online petition "PRIME MINISTER INDIA: Kindly stop the transfer of Dr. Venu Vasudevan, Director General, National Museum Delhi".

For a cultural body's head to receive this kind of attention is unusual but Venu Vasudevan's tireless effort at National Museum is too hard to ignore. But for Government of India which seems apathetic towards cultural institutions, their progression or regression isn't really a matter of concern.

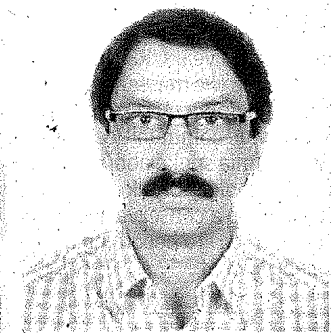
"When you experience change, and radical change, within a year, right from programming and outreach, to visitor experience and signage, when you see packed halls for exciting exhibitions, people from different sections of society, some of

whom might have never felt so drawn to the museum before, you know the place is being led by a person who has truly understood its purpose," responds Sardana over email. She is currently studying arts and culture management at New York University.

Ruchira Ghosh, former director of Crafts Museum, who led the space to recovery, is equally disappointed with the decision. "Even just considering that Dr. Venu was given a written order that he was being appointed to the National Museum for three years, until December 2016, this decision to transfer him to the Ministry of Sports is totally arbitrary. But if his performance during the short period he has been at the helm is reviewed, then the decision to move him out is not just random — it is extremely callous and short-sighted,

and a tragedy for the National Museum and the country. Dr Venu has managed, in less than 18 months, to totally revitalise the museum, opening up galleries closed for years, organizing many exhibitions of excellent quality and, perhaps most significantly, bringing in a new work culture, enthusiasm and excitement, in what was for all purposes a dead institution," Ghosh, whose five year tenure saw a snazzy café, a refurbished store, refurbishment of dormitories of the visiting craftsmen, revamp of galleries, and an increased number of visitors.

"I do feel that government generally, and as a body, does not always understand the value of culture and heritage. And often when it tries to, it does so in such a ham-handed fashion that it does more harm than good! This is per-



haps even more true of crafts where we are constantly battling against the general perception in government that craft is a 'sunset' industry! As regards cultural institutions, the essential problem is that there is no care of institutions in government. If the government was concerned about the National Museum, if they had done their homework and taken the trouble to understand the huge transformation that has taken place, could they have ever suggested that Dr. Venu be moved out?" adds Ghosh revealing that the recruitment rules for the post of Senior Director were recently severely downgraded from a technocratic post requiring a Ph.D and many years of experience in the crafts sector, to a completely bureaucratic one, where all that is now required is 12 years experience in government administration!

Like Crafts Museum, there is a lot of unfinished work at National Museum which will get impacted by his transfer. What happens to the eight exhibitions planned for 2015 including a large scale exhibition on the Parsi minorities' heritage, publications and academic research on collections, will depend on the timely appointment of his successor and many more things.

Continued on Page 3

...Killing it softly

Continued from Page 1

"National Museum was headless for several years which really affected the institution. After Dr. Venu joined it, he made it alive not just through some incredible exhibitions but internally too through archiving, documentation. He should be allowed to continue," says Jyotindra Jain, a museologist who has headed National Crafts Museum and IGNCA in the past. He has signed Sardana's petition.

Hoping and praying for National Museum to continue on its current path, Sardana cites a particular remark by a signee, "The National Museum of India, the face of India's culture to the world and its own people had just begun to communicate with people. Is it then prudent to cause his transfer? He is doing incredible work and being untimely moved to another Ministry, I wish such erratic decisions were unheard of and hope that this petition is heard."

Museum on a roll under Venu Vasudevan

* One of the highlights of his tenure is Yuva Saathi Programme under which college students were trained as guides for visiting school groups at the museum.

* For the public there is Volunteer Guide Programme (VGP) or Path Pradarshak. Visitors interested in visiting the museum with the help of a guide can book their requirement of a guide on National Museum's website in advance. On this 90 minutes tour, the trained guides introduce highlights from the displayed collection which runs into lakhs of art works.

* "The Museum in 90 Minutes" was another initiative launched to make the whole experience easy and quick for those who are pressed for time. A booklet titled "The Museum in 90 Minutes", given to visitors free of cost, introduces them to 25 most unique pieces of the museum. With the help of the

book and the audio-guide, navigating the museum is like a breeze.

* Some major exhibitions like "Musical Landscapes & The Goddesses of Music Recent Advances in Interactive Art", "A Passionate Eye Textiles, Paintings and sculptures from the Bharany Donation", "Unearthing Patanam - Histories, Cultures, Crossings. Union Culture Minister Dr. Mahesh Sharma to Open Exhibition: Trench Replica, Select Excavation Findings", "Nauras: The Many Arts of the Deccan", "The Peranakan World: Cross Cultural Art of Singapore and the Straits of Malacca" and "The Body in Indian Art" - a stunning exhibition of 300 art works from 44 institutions, studying representation of body over 4000 years across regions, religion and culture.

* Before Venu Vasudevan joined, six crucial galleries were shut at the museum for years. While four of these galleries have been opened, a

new one launched, and the remaining two - Bronze and Manuscripts - are to open later this year in 2015.

* In collaboration with UNESCO, the museum organised a seminal workshop on 'Making Museums Accessible for Persons with Disabilities' in April this year. The workshop coincided with the exhibition "Cadence and Counterpoint: Documenting Santal Musical Traditions" wherein a Braille booklet, tactile graphics and an audio-guide are being used for the first time for the benefit for visually-impaired people.

* Nearly 10,000 objects have been digitised and put online making it accessible to public.

* A number of publications, lectures, talks, public programmes, children's programmes.

* He also played an important role in organising the Kochi Biennale 2014.

* A theatre practitioner, he performs with his theatre group "Abhinaya".

Desi cotton poised for a comeback in North

Bt variety unlikely to be hit by the trend; area under the fibre may remain at last year's level

VISHWANATH KULKARNI
Bengaluru, May 6

Desi cotton is set to stage a comeback in North India this year. Lured by relatively better returns, farmers seem to prefer planting the *desi* or native varieties for the current kharif sowing season. However, seed companies maintain that demand for Bt hybrids is intact.

Though the area under such native varieties may not see a significant jump, the fact that farmers prefer it due to its ability to withstand pests and drought is interesting. Besides, the *desi* cotton prices are about 20 per cent higher than the Bt cotton due to short supplies. The short staple and coarse *desi* variety cotton is mostly used as surgical cotton due to its better absorption ca-

capacity and also in making denim.

Sowing at brisk pace

"Sowing across Punjab, Haryana and Rajasthan is being done in a brisk manner. An interesting trend being observed is that farmers are keen on planting the *desi* varieties. This has triggered a demand for *desi* seeds, which we are unable to supply," said KR Kranthi, Director at the Nagpur-based Central Institute of Cotton Research (CICR).

The *desi* varieties such as CICR I, CICR III and RG8, that are immune to diseases such as cotton leaf curl virus, a major menace in neighbouring Pakistan, have seen good demand. "This demand for *desi* varieties is seen coming back after almost five to



seven years," Kranthi said. Till 5-7 years ago, North India used to have about 60,000-80,000 hectares under the *desi* varieties. "This year, we could see that area coming back," Kranthi said.

In cotton growing tracts of North India in Punjab, Haryana and the Ganganagar region of Rajasthan, the fibre crop is planted in early May for better results. Currently, plantings are being

carried out at a brisk pace, as a delay in wheat harvest has somewhat reduced the window for sowing.

Bt varieties unfazed

"Though there appears to be some interest in *desi* varieties, the demand for Bt cotton hybrids is unlikely to be impacted," said Paresh Verma, Research Director at Bioseed, the seed busi-

Blooming Acreage (in lakh ha)		
	2014	2013
Punjab	4.5	4.46
Haryana	6.39	5.36
Rajasthan	4.54	3.93
Total North India	15.43	13.75

ness of DCM Shriram Ltd. Bioseed is the largest player in the hybrid cottonseed market in North India, accounting for about 40 per cent of the total market of 65 lakh packets in the region.

"In fact, we used to sell *desi* hybrids till about five to seven years ago," Verma said adding that Bioseed could possibly looking at reintroducing them if the market demands.

The genetically modified Bt cotton hybrids had seen a steady increase over the past decade and now accounts for over 96 per cent of the total cotton area,

which stood at a record 12.97 million hectares last year.

"The start for this year's kharif planting season in North India has been good," said M Ramasami, CEO of Attur, Salem-based Rasi Seeds Pvt Ltd, the second largest player in the cotton seed market in the region. Rasi has introduced a new hybrid for the Indian market and expects to better its sales this year.

Acreage unchanged

Ramasami said that the total area in North India was unlikely to change despite the low prices that the fibre fetched for farmers last year in the region as competitive crops such as guar (cluster bean) also had not fared well. Though rice also posed a challenge for cotton in Punjab, the declining water table and the poor returns that basmati fetched last year could prompt farmers to go for cotton.