

Top designers will give push to dreams of Banarasi weavers

Amita Shah@dna

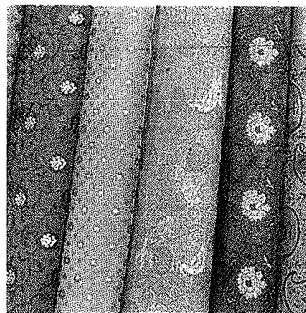
New Delhi: In his small square shop in the narrow lanes of Varanasi, Zaheer Ansari has kept each exquisite silk Banarsi saree carefully wrapped in white muslin. His angst is there are few appreciators and even fewer buyers. With the cheaper Chinese thread finding its way into one of India's most known weaves, people like Ansari have had several sleepless nights.

The designers fraternity and the government are now joining hands promising to bring the weavers of Varanasi a ray of hope. BJP leader Shaina NC, a fashion designer herself, has roped in designers like Ritu Ku-

mar, Manish Malhotra, Sandeep Khosla, Shruti Sancheti, Anita Dongre and Rina Dhaka to be part of a campaign to "design, manufacture and produce the best textiles in Banaras".

The initiative, to be promoted under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Make in India theme, envisages getting the weavers back into the mainstream of their talent and generating employment. After the experiment with the Banarsi saree, we propose to expand to other traditional weaves like the Paithani sarees in Maharashtra, said Shaina, who has conceptualised the idea.

The designers will adopt clusters and work with the Banarsi weavers, tapping their skill to



produce the traditional weave. "The weavers don't get to know if they are working with the Chinese thread, which produces cheaper but coarser sarees," said Shaina. As of now, less than 50 per cent of the sarees in the

Bollywood to rescue

Zaheer Ansari agrees that if designers get into the scene, it would help the weavers. "And if Bollywood stars wear the sarees it will encourage people to buy them," he said.

However, he has a word of caution for the designers. "They should retain the originality of the Banarsi saree," says Ansari.

market are of skilled handloom.

The product will finally find its way to be exhibited in major museums across the country and later be promoted in the international fora under the 'Make

in India' brand. But, Shaina is hopeful of taking the traditional weaves not just to people in the country but also showcasing them before the international audience. "To belong in the 21st century, we need a new definition of skilled handlooms and the handmade. The textile of today must have a high labour-intensity, low waste and pollution potential, wide recognition, and above all else, a sense of self-worth and a decent standard of living for the artisan and the weaver... If we don't, some artisans will desert their art," said the Maharashtra spokesperson.

The weavers of Varanasi, the constituency of the Modi himself, had made a special Banarsi

saree for US first Lady Michelle Obama during her India trip along with President Barack Obama earlier this year.

Last year in Varanasi, Modi had announced financial aid package of Rs2375 crore for 16 sick cooperative banks to make loans easily available for weavers. "Every mother dreams of gifting at least one Banarsi saree to her daughter in marriage," he had said then.

Last week, minister of state for minority affairs Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi launched the "USTTAD" (Upgrading the Skills and Training in Traditional Arts/Crafts for Development) scheme in the city to help traditional artisans.

Fables of the Fabric

The vast textile heritage of India is being celebrated and chronicled at a permanent gallery space in Mumbai

AMRUTA LAKHE

IN 2000, the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalaya (CSMVS) closed down the gallery space dedicated to its rich collection of textiles, as it did not meet conservation norms. After 15 years, over 1,000 of these heritage pieces have found a new home. A permanent space in the Mumbai museum that opened last week — on the second floor of the East Wing — showcases treasures such as the weaves of Nana Phadnis, a minister of the Peshwas; a *jhabla-topi* worn by Jamsetji Tata and rich Pashminas from Kashmir among others. Through the permanent

exhibition “Indian Textile and Costume”, the museum has mapped the vast textile heritage of India. The display will change every six months.

“The need to preserve the textiles in our collection was urgently felt by the museum,” says Manisha Nene, curator of the 3,000-square feet gallery. Nene’s dream was finally realised after her team received a government grant in 2012. Among others, the “Royal Textiles” section houses the stunning costumes of the ladies of a royal household, with heavy and elaborate *ghagra-choli* and *odhani*, *kurtis*, *pajama* and *peshwaz*. The fine Dhaka muslin, generally used for *jamias* (coat), is also on display. Pointing to it, Nene notes, the

exquisite craftsmanship of the weave was judged by the fact that one could pass ten yards (eleven-meter) long cloth, which was one yard in width, through a finger ring. The next section takes one on a journey across India through textiles, with saris such as Paithani, Maheshwari, Baluchari, Karuppur and Banarasi on display.

Dedicated solely to heritage textiles, the space promises visitors a personal experience. “Usually textiles in a museum are classified by the region they belong to, but we decided to build a rapport between the exhibits and the viewer,” says Nene, who has created a textile timeline. Clothes worn during different stages of a person’s life — an in-



The display at the 3000-sq ft gallery will change every six months Prashant Nadkar

fant, a child, young adult, a bride, a housewife and the elderly — from across the country are exhibited in glass cases. “Fabrics have memories associated with them. We want to invoke those and bring to focus not the region but the emotion behind textiles,” she says.

The museum also invited people to share photos of their family dressed in traditional attires. A video created using these plays on a loop in the gallery, which also has sections dedicated to “religious textiles”, such as Andhra Pradesh’s *kalamkaris* (painted cloth to narrate the stories of gods and goddesses), Gujarat’s *chod* (backdrop for an idol), *chandarvo* (canopy) and *torana* (door hanging). Borrowed from the TAPI Collection of Praful and Shilpa Shah, a specially-curated section has the contributions of Indian traders in the 17th and 18th centuries, who did business with foreign countries such as Mesopotamia, Persia, Iran, Egypt, China, Japan, Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

PUJA BANERJEE

THE HANDLOOM sector plays a very important role in the country's economy. It is one of the largest economic activity providing direct employment to over 70 lakhs persons engaged in weaving and allied activities. Handloom Industry is the symbol of self reliance and generates employment for millions of small weavers.

A panel discussion on *Revival of handloom and increasing earning of the the Handloom weavers*, was recently held at the India International Centre, where the panelists were Ritu Kumar, eminent Fashion Designer, Sudha Pillai, Retd. IAS, Member Secretary of Planning Commission, Jaya Jaitley, Founder – President of Dastkari Haat Samiti, Anita Lal, the founder of Good Earth, along with SK Panda, IAS, Secretary, Ministry of Textiles.

"The economy of Panipat is based on several industrial agriculture, tourism and handloom. The city is famous for 'panja durrie', a kind of floor covering, which is in great demand in India and abroad. Originally, it was a tradi-

tional item made by village women but slowly the product came to be recognised beyond Panipat and growing demand for durries resulted in a burgeoning numbers of private and state owned weaving units within the city," said SK Panda, IAS, Secretary, Ministry of Textiles.

Fashion designer Ritu Kumar noted, "Handloom goods are the

important cottage and home industries taken up by the people. Among the women folk, handloom cloth weaving is the traditional occupation of the district. The whole handloom industry survives on heavy subsidies today, as it has always done."

Jaya Jaitley, founder-president of the Dastkari Haat Samiti shared how she brought into being the vibrant Dilli

HANDLOOM PUSH



Jaya Jaitley

SK Panda

Haat where crafts are displayed and sold in the atmosphere of a mela.

Author of the book *The Artistry of Handwork*, she further explains, "We take things for granted and don't perceive what is around us. This book helps us notice, and feel happy about the simple beauty of craft."

But the question which lingers is... 'People are willing to spend so much in malls on different products and they don't bargain. Why not on crafts that help form our identity and culture?', to which Sudha Pillai, Retd. IAS, Member Secretary of Planning Commission commented, 'Many exhibitions need to be showcased, which displays applications on metal, wood, clay, woven textiles and traditional art.'

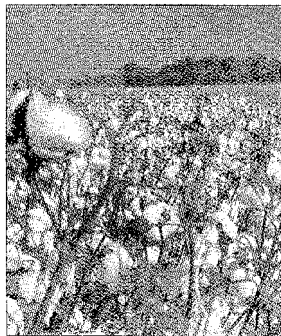
There are hand block-printed and embroidered textiles from Rajasthan, hand-woven textiles from Varanasi, terracotta from Kerala, leatherwork from West Bengal, Madhubani art, hand-painted and natural-dyed textiles in Kalamkari from Andhra Pradesh, Pattachitra from Orissa, painted wooden objects from Kashmir and plenty more to choose from.'

CAI revises cotton estimates downward

fe Bureau

Pune, May 19: The Cotton Association of India (CAI), which has released its April estimate of cotton crop, has further revised its estimate for the 2014-15 season (October-September) downward. CAI has placed the cotton estimates at 384.50 lakh bales of 170 kgeach.

The projected balance



sheet drawn by the CAI for 2014-15 estimates total cotton supply at 455.40 lakh bales while domestic consumption is estimated at 310 lakh bales, thus leaving an available surplus of 145.40 lakh bales.

Close to 90% of the total crop has already arrived into the market. However, cotton arrivals have fallen drastically during the month of April this year, according to CAI.

Arrivals during April were 27.05 lakh bales as compared to 40.00 lakh bales that had arrived during the same month last year. This constitutes a fall of about 32%.

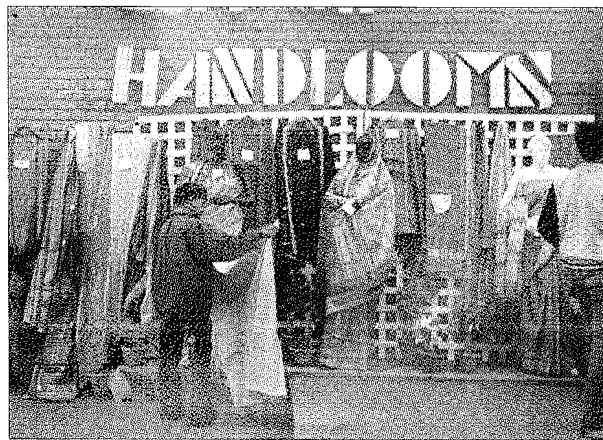
Compared to last month i.e. March 2015, when 42.20 lakh bales had arrived into the market, cotton arrivals fell by around 36% to 27.05 lakh bales during April, 2015, Dhiren Seth, president, CAI, said.

Steps being taken to revive handlooms sector, says govt

New Delhi, May 19: Textiles ministry on Tuesday said steps are underway to revive handlooms and a panel also deliberated on the issue, including aggressive marketing, design innovations and popularising handlooms among youth to increase the income of weavers.

"A discussion on revival of handloom, with particular focus on increasing earning of handloom weavers, was held," the ministry said.

The panel discussed the need to excite the younger generation about handlooms, the diversity of marketing opportunities available to promote handlooms, the need for innovations in design and weaving process-



es and the need for customer education.

It comprised stakeholders from government, industry and civil society

The meeting of the panel comprising stakeholders

from government, industry and civil society was organized on May 17 by the office of Development Commissioner (Handlooms), ministry of textiles.

"Youth, fashion and tech-

nology hold the key to the future of handloom," textiles secretary SK Panda stated at the meet.

Panda asserted that concern for the handloom weavers should guide all interventions of state and non-state actors.

He outlined the context in which the handloom weavers operate, and the various policy interventions that the government has been making in order to improve the earning of handloom weavers.

The panel consisted of former member secretary of the Planning Commission Sudha Pillai IAS (retd.); leading fashion designer Ritu Kumar, Panda, among others.

PTI

India's apparel exports shoot up 9.2% in April

■ Shipments hit \$1.44 bn in April against \$1.32 bn a year earlier

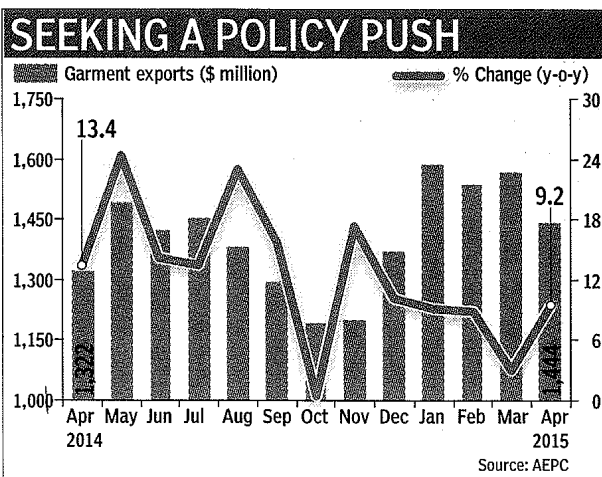
fe Bureau

New Delhi, May 19

AFTER a meagre 2.8% rise in March, India's garment exports grew 9.2% in April from a year before, Apparel Exports Promotion Council (AEPC) chairman Virender Uppal said on Tuesday.

Apparel exports hit \$1.44 billion in April, compared with \$1.32 billion a year earlier. The growth rate in garment exports last month is lower than 12.2% expansion in the entire last fiscal. However, the growth is still impressive, considering the country's overall exports dropped 14% in April from a year before, having dropped by 21% to hit a 67-month low in March.

Despite the relatively better performance by the garment sector, Uppal said there has been "a vacuum in a policy support" to the readymade garment manufacturing export industry. In the recent FTP announcement, certain export incentives were withdrawn. AEPC had recommended a 5% duty credit scrip for major markets, including the US and the EU, and a flat rate of 2% for other nations.



"No Merchandise Exports from India Scheme (MEIS) has been announced to Latin America, West Asia, CIS countries, Africa and Oceania countries. The non-traditional markets which constitute around 35% share in India's garment exports are poised to receive a setback due to withdrawal of the benefits of the Chapter 3 benefits," Uppal said.

The EU market constitutes 41% of the India's RMG exports. While conditions in major markets like EU continue to be far from satisfactory, India is also facing a duty disadvantage of 9.6%, compared with competing countries like

Bangladesh and Pakistan which are having zero duty access to that market.

Similarly, the US constitutes 21.7% of India's RMG exports and the market condition in the US is yet to rebound sharply. "The prospects of considerable improvement in the market are rather limited due to competition from countries like Vietnam and Mexico, which have zero duty access under preferential treaties with the US," Uppal said.

AEPC seeks sops to boost exports

Uppal has demanded a 3% interest subvention retrospectively, from the beginning of the last fiscal, to par-

The growth in garment exports is impressive, considering the country's overall exports dropped 14% in April from a year before, having dropped by 21% to hit a 67-month low in March

tially mitigate high cost of lending, which is hovering around 11-12% compared with 4-6% in competing countries. He has also sought support from the FTP — a 5% duty credit scrip to major markets.

AEPC has said the government should ensure swift clearances of import and export by customs.

The government should also finalise on an urgent basis the India-EU FTA and the CEPA with Canada so as to "mitigate the duty disadvantage suffered by India vis-à-vis its competitors like Bangladesh, Cambodia, Vietnam, Pakistan, etc., in the major markets", Uppal said.

Handlooms sector to be revived

The textiles ministry is taking steps to revive handlooms and a panel on Tuesday discussed marketing, design innovations and popularising handlooms among youth to raise weavers' income, it said.

Esprit faces slow sales

Esprit, which sells casual knitwear and jeans in Europe and Asia, fell to the lowest since 2001 after forecasting a substantial loss for the year to June amid slow sales and poor performance.

Compiled from agencies

Gangwar trains his guns on RaGa for criticising Modi's foreign tours

ANUP SHARMA ■ GUWAHATI

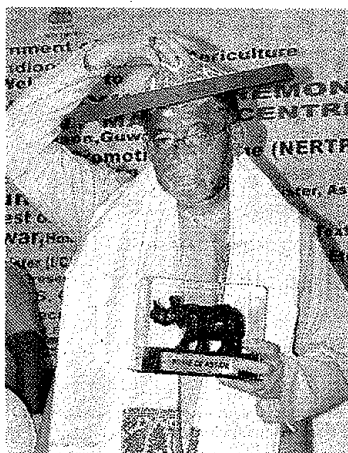
Union Minister of State for Textiles Santosh Kumar Gangwar trained his guns on Rahul Gandhi over his recent criticism of Prime Minister Narendra Modi for frequent foreign tours and said that unlike Gandhi, the Prime Minister tell the people of the country before visiting abroad.

"Modiji jahan jate hain desh ko batake jate hain aur desh ke liye jate hain. Rahul Gandhi bina bataye jate hain" (Wherever Modiji goes, he goes for the country and after giving proper information to the people of the country. However, Rahul Gandhi never tells anyone where he goes," said Gangwar while interacting with media here in Guwahati on Tuesday.

Gangwar also slammed the Congress vice-president for his comments of the food park in UP and said there is nothing there in the name of food park. "I belong to UP and I have gone there and seen that there is nothing," he said.

The Union Minister was in Guwahati on Tuesday to lay the foundation stone of a Garment and Apparel making centre.

"Prime Minister Narendra Modi has given special attention to the Ministry of Textiles, with special focus on States in the



Union Minister of State for Textiles (Independent) Santosh Kumar Gangwar being felicitated during the foundation stone laying ceremony for apparel and garment making centre, in Guwahati on Tuesday PTI

North Eastern Region. The Apparel and Garment Making Centres are being opened in every State in the region, as part of the landmark initiative announced by Modi in Nagaland, on December 1, 2014," he said while adding that the Central Government is looking forward to work closely with the State Governments for overall development.

"The work have already been started in Nagaland for Garment and Apparel making Centre. We are also working on natural fibres available in different parts of the northeastern

region to use as textiles," he said.

Under this scheme each State will have one centre with three units, each having 100 machines. For local entrepreneurs with requisite background, required facilities to start a unit will be provided in 'plug and play' mode. Once such entrepreneurs get established, they can set up their own units, allowing the facility to be provided to new entrepreneurs.

The initiative comes under the North East Region Textile Promotion Scheme (NERTPS) of the Ministry of Textiles. NERTPS is an umbrella scheme for the development of various segments of textiles, i.e. silk, handlooms, handicrafts and apparels & garments. The scheme has a total outlay of ₹1,038.10 crore in the 12th Five Year Plan.

The project will be completed in three months and the total cost of the project would be ₹18 crore, fully funded by Government of India. He said that this project will be helpful in skill upgradation, garment development and marketing.

The Secretary added that a scheme, worth ₹427 crore, has been sanctioned to promote geotechnical textiles in the North East, which will be helpful in stabilizing roads, addressing the problem of landslides and preserving water bodies.

'Youth, fashion and tech key to future of handlooms'

Textile Ministry says panel deliberating on issue of increasing income of weavers

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

New Delhi, May 19

The Ministry of Textiles on Tuesday said steps are under way to revive the handloom sector and that a panel is also deliberating on the issue of aggressive marketing, design innovations and popularising handlooms amongst the youth to increase income of weavers.

"A discussion on revival of handlooms, with particular focus on increasing earning of handloom weavers, was held," a statement from the Textiles Ministry said.

The panel discussed the need to excite the younger generation about handlooms, the diversity of marketing opportunities available to promote handlooms, the need for innovations in design and weaving processes, and the need for customer edu-

cation. It comprised stakeholders from the government, industry and civil society.

The meeting of the panel comprising stakeholders from government, industry and civil society was organised recently by the office of Development Commissioner (Handlooms), Ministry of Textiles.

"Youth, fashion and technology hold the key to the future of handlooms," Textiles Secretary SK Panda stated at the meet.

Panda asserted that concern for the handloom weavers should guide all interventions of State and non-State actors.

He outlined the context in which the handloom weavers operate, and the various policy interventions the Centre has been making in order to improve the income of handloom weavers.

The panel consisted of former Member Secretary of the Planning Commission Sudha Pillai IAS (Retd.), leading fashion designer Ritu Kumar, Panda, among others.