



Indian Ambassador Sibi George is seen during the 'Indian Handloom Exhibition'.—Photos by Yasser Al-Zayyat



INDIA'S HANDLOOM HERITAGE ON DISPLAY AT SADU HOUSE

By Sajeev K Peter

The 'Indian Handloom Exhibition', organized by the Indian Embassy, in association with National Council for Culture, Arts and Letters (NCCAL), at Sadu House on Sunday is a symbolic representation of India's diverse and rich handloom sector. Each textile piece on display reflects the aesthetic intricacies involved in the craft and the cultural richness and elegance of India's distinct handloom tradition.

The exhibition was jointly inaugurated by Indian Ambassador Sibi George and NCCAL's Assistant Secretary-General for Cultural Affairs Dr Bader Al-Duwaish. The exhibition is open for public from 10 am to 8 pm until May 31.

"This exhibition is part of the yearlong celebration we launched last year to mark the 60th anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between India and Kuwait," the ambassador told a press conference on Sunday on the sidelines of the exhibition.

A tour of the exhibition will help you realize how the handspun and woven fabrics from handlooms are integral to India's cultural identity. From Jammu and Kashmir to Kerala and Tamil Nadu, from North East to Rajasthan and Gujarat, handloom crafts in diverse variety and style are spread across thousands of towns and villages in all states of India. Indian artists are now distinguished worldwide for their hand-spinning, weaving and printing elegance. The visitors will not only get to see the exquisite handloom products of each Indian state on display, but can get a glimpse of each region's geography and culture.

For instance, 'Pochampally Ikat' textile works from Bhoodan, Pochampally in Telengana state is known for its geometric patterns and an intentional bleed. With 5,000 looms in the Pochampally village weaving this ikat fabric, the place has found a place on UNESCO's tentative list of World Heritage Sites as part of the iconic sari-weaving clusters of India. Similarly, a hand-woven silk sari from



the town of Paithan in Maharashtra, vouches for effort-intensive process of weaving the garment. Interestingly, Paithani fabric looks exactly the same on both sides. History of the Bandhani handloom of Gujarat dates back to the Indus

Valley Civilization, where dyeing was done as early as 4000 BC. Made by the Khatri community of Gujarat, this gorgeous tie-dye textile is usually found in multiple colors like yellow, blue, green and red and features white dots that form

interesting patterns on the fabric.

Dubbed as the pride of Kerala, the 'Kasavu' is the traditional off-white and gold Kasavu sari and is famously worn by women of the Malayali community on festival occasions. Kasavu actually refers to the golden sari border on dhoti-sari that is hand-woven, using 100 percent unbleached cotton. These saris feature line designs at the bottoms and sometimes peacock designs as well.

Similarly, Kalamkari of Andhra Pradesh comes from the Persian words 'qalam' meaning pen and 'kari' means craftsmanship. This art form, which was particularly patronized by the Mughals, is now more popular as block-print used on saris, dupattas and more. Chikkankari from Uttar Pradesh, Muga Silk from Assam, Lepcha from Sikkim and Shisha from Rajasthan were among the other exquisite handloom garments on display at the exhibition.



Nigerian biker completes London to Lagos ride for polio campaign

A crowd cheered Kunle Adeyanju as he turned off his motorbike engine after completing an arduous 41-day trip to raise funds to fight polio in his native Nigeria. The 44-year-old departed London on April 19 and arrived in Nigeria's commercial hub Lagos on Sunday after slogging through more than 13,000 kilometers (8,000 miles) across 13 countries. His aim was to raise funds for Rotary International's fight against polio, which remains a threat in Africa despite being eradicated in 2020. "I am sleep-deprived because I slept only three to four hours per night. But I feel proud

because I accomplished this challenge," Adeyanju told AFP just after he arrived, wiping sweat off his face.

Accompanied by a dozen bikers for the last stretch of the journey from Benin Republic, the group was welcomed by supporters in Ikeja, in central Lagos. Adeyanju, called "Lion Heart" by fans, became popular by posting daily pictures with comments of his journey on social media. At every stop along the way, he was greeted by jubilant supporters. In Senegal, Ghana, and even in countries battling jihadist insurgencies like Mali and Burkina Faso, Adeyanju posed for selfies with fans and local officials, waving a banner saying "End Polio Now."

He did face some challenges, like in Mali where one of his wheel rims broke. "I was standing in the middle of the night, alone in a bush, not knowing what to do, without speaking the language," he said, explaining he had to walk to the nearest village. "I could have been disposed of but instead, they helped me. Humanity at its best!" Not all of the challenges he faced were resolved as smoothly.

Mauritania was "hellish" he said, after he got robbed of hundreds of euros (dollars). "The worst experience," he added. With only three followers on Twitter a few months ago, the Nigerian national now has almost 100,000, catching the attention of the social platform's CEO. "Thanks for sharing your inspiring journey with the world on Twitter, and with our @TwitterGhana team. Love to see it #LondonToLagos," said the tech boss Parag Agrawal.

Polio fight not over
Adeyanju said he embarked on the epic journey in memory of a friend who was affected by polio.

The former Shell employee self-funded his trip with 19,000 euros (\$20,400) in savings, hoping to raise up to 20 million naira (\$48 million) for Rotary International. "Polio still exists," said Delight Sunday-Anicho, who manages Rotary's branch in Ikoyi, a wealthy neighborhood in Lagos. "We haven't won the fight yet, even if we have largely contained it."

Polio can cause life-long paralysis. The virus is transmitted among humans through water or food that has been contaminated by faeces. There is no cure, but a cheap and highly effective vaccine has been available since the 1950s. Indigenous polio was eradicated from Africa in 2020 after a decades-long vaccination campaign, which in Nigeria was marred by attacks by Boko Haram jihadists. But the disease remains to be wiped out in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and this poses a threat to the unvaccinated people elsewhere.

Outbreaks have occurred this year in Malawi and Mozambique from a strain that had circulated in Pakistan. The authorities have engaged on a mass immunization of youngsters. Adeyanju is eyeing a possible cycling trip to Ghana or a bike ride to Israel to help raise more funds. And he has another dream: to climb Mount Everest.—AFP



Kunle Adeyanju (center) celebrates with supporters after arriving at the Ikeja Rotary club in Lagos after a 41-day trip from London, by motorbike, to raise funds and awareness for the End Polio campaign.—AFP photos

Killer whale stranded in France's River Seine dies

A killer whale stranded for weeks in France's River Seine was found dead Monday after attempts to guide it back to sea failed and revealed it was severely sick, local authorities said. Regional officials had already decided to euthanize the killer whale—also known as an orca—to end its suffering, but a sailor spotted the animal lying on its side Monday morning. Sea Shepherd France, who went out to the animal and confirmed its death, said on Twitter they were watching over the orca's body to prevent it from being hit by a ship, which would compromise the autopsy.

The investigation will try to establish why the orca got stranded and how it died, as well as gather information on its illness, local authorities said. A group of experts attempted to use sonar techniques to help guide the animal back into its natural salt-water habitat this weekend, after its appearance in the iconic French river that flows through Paris astonished onlookers. But the operation

seeking to save the animal encountered "a lack of alertness, inconsistent reactions to sound stimuli and erratic and disoriented behavior," regional authorities said in a statement.

"The sound recordings also revealed vocal calls similar to cries of distress," it said, adding that the animal appeared to be in a "critical state of health." "Her skin was so ulcerated... She must have been in agony. Pieces of skin were falling off, there was nothing that could be done," said Gerard Mauger, vice-president of GECC, a Cherbourg-based association for the conservation of marine animals in the Channel.

"Everything was ready to euthanize her" when she was found dead, Mauger added. The animal appeared to be suffering from mucormycosis, a fungal infection increasingly seen among marine mammals and which causes them severe distress. Killer whales, which, despite their name belong to the dolphin family, are occasionally spotted in the English Channel but such sightings are considered rare, and even rarer in a river. Experts said that while being in a river helped the animal to conserve energy, it also complicated its search for prey, especially for a species known to hunt in packs.—AFP

