



# Looming danger

The new handloom Act will sound the death knell for the handloom industry, veteran designer Ritu Kumar tells **Nivedita** in an interview

**T**alk of a change in the Handloom Reservation Act, which has since 1985 protected handloom weaves from being copied by machine-made and powerloom competitors, has got veteran designer Ritu Kumar worried about the plight of millions of India's weavers who are already fighting for their livelihood.

A notable name in the Indian fashion industry, who has focussed her efforts towards resurrecting the handloom industry and craft of local weavers from different regions, Kumar says that any change in the Act may not only impact the lives of over four million weavers, but could lead to the death of handloom itself in the country.

"The Act has protected handloom for decades. It has protected yarn and allows our weaver community to thrive. There's a movement to scrap that in favour of powerloom. I am strongly protesting against it," Kumar told IANS in an interview in New Delhi.

"If they take away the reservation of handloom, it will affect 4.4 million weavers and there won't be any handloom left in this country," she added.

It has been speculated that the government plans to amend the Handloom Reservation Act. The news comes against

the backdrop of efforts by the powerloom lobby to get parity with the handloom sector, which has called on the government to implement the Act.

Asked if the amendment will affect the charm of the weaving process, for which India is known globally, Kumar said: "More than the romance and charm, what we will lose will be a huge chunk of livelihood."

The designer, who has spent over four decades in the fashion industry and has witnessed the changes in the interests of national and international buyers, also shared how "there is a strong lobbying happening around the country".

As part of her contribution to the weaving sector, Kumar held a sari exhibition in the capital. It saw rare handblock prints from Bengal – and it's an effort on her part to revive craft from the region and create employment for weavers there.

For the line, Kumar has taken inspiration from former Danish colony of Serampore, which she had explored in the mid-1960s when she was a student of art history.

"I couldn't understand why there was no work (for weavers there). Of little samples that I saw, it was so beautiful and I wondered why they had no work. They were painting polka dots for export to

America at the same price as synthetic scarves, and it was terrible. I wasn't really a designer of print, but I said, 'Let me try and do something'. I made blocks and asked them to print them on saris.

"It's an old heritage which came back to life. Over the years, we carried the block printing and I also used Bhagalpur silk, which is made from ahimsa silk from that region," Kumar explained.

The designer hopes that with her work she "will be able to give at least that amount of work to those weavers once again with the renewed interest". But awareness needs to be created, she stressed.

"We need to create more awareness about Indian handlooms. More education is required. People hardly know what they are wearing," said Kumar, whose creations have been flaunted by names like Jemima Khan, Sushmita Sen, Aishwarya Rai and even the late Princess Diana.

Kumar's work and involvement with weavers keeps her away from glitzy runway shows, but she's not complaining.

"I am taking some time off to focus on these weavers, but I have not quit. I think Label (son Amrith Kumar's designer label) is doing wonderfully well in maintaining our signature crafts in a modern way." – IANS

# Rajashree Birla joins Century Textiles board

BS REPORTER

Mumbai, 5 May

Rajashree Birla, one of the promoters of the Aditya Birla Group, joined the Century Textiles board on Tuesday as a promoter director.

The appointment, cleared by the company's board today, is significant because Aditya Birla group companies are increasing their stakes in Century Textiles to 50 per cent from 45 per cent after conversion of a preferential offer of shares issued to the promoters in July 2014.

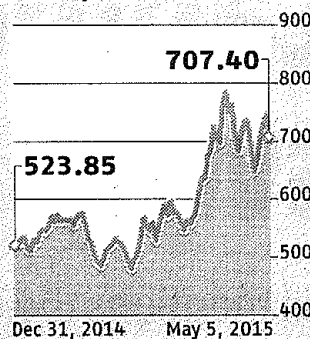
The appointment is seen as a precursor to the BK Birla group companies, Century Textiles and Kesoram Industries, synergising operations with Aditya Birla group companies.

The board position fell vacant after Sarala Birla, wife of BK Birla, died last month. Kumar Mangalam Birla, chairman of the Aditya Birla group, Rajashree's son and BK Birla's grandson, chairs board meetings at Century Textiles.

Century Textiles' shares closed 5.24 per cent down today at ₹707 as investors were expecting the company to announce the transfer of the company's cement division to Aditya Birla group's Ultratech. The Century Textiles stock has shot up 35 per

## CENTURY TEXTILES

Share price on BSE in ₹



Compiled by BS Research Bureau

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For 2014-15, the company reported ₹7,559 crore of revenue and ₹15 crore of profit.

In an interview on Sunday, Kumar Mangalam Birla denied plans to demerge Century Textiles' cement division and merge it with UltraTech. Birla, however, said UltraTech was planning to increase its cement capacity to 100 million tonnes from 71 million tonnes. Century Textiles has 12.8 million tonnes of cement capacity, while

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In a note dated April 14, global brokerage firm Credit Suisse said Ultratech could improve the profitability of BK Birla's cement assets by 50 per cent and a merger with Ultratech would be a win-win deal for all stakeholders. Approval by the Competition Commission of India for the deal might be needed in Maharashtra, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh.

According to a plan prepared by Axis Capital, Century Textiles and Kesoram Industries could merge their cement units with Ultratech in an all-stock transaction. The Birlas have not confirmed this plan.



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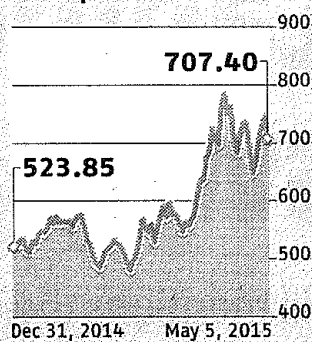
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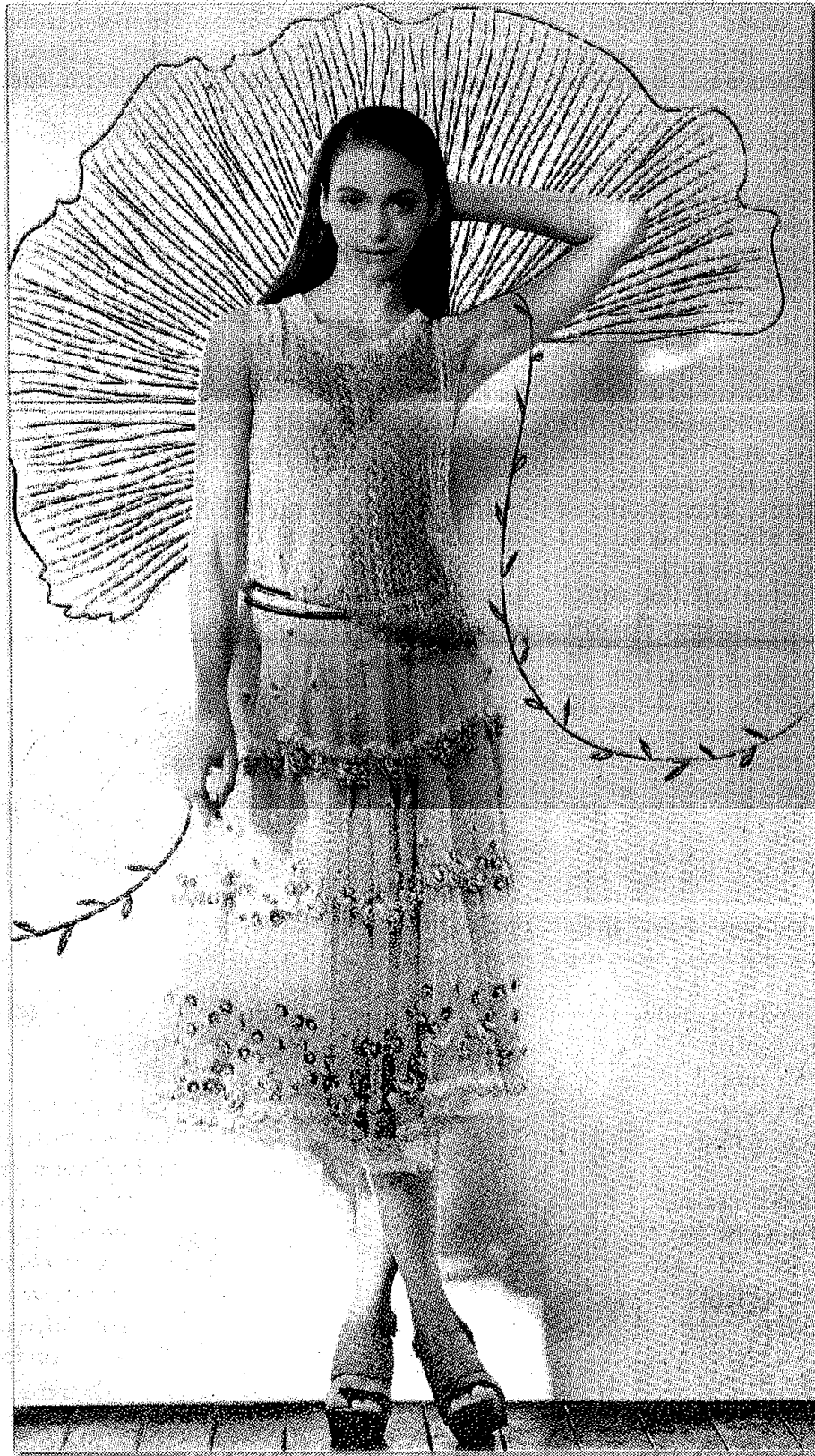
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# That '70s Show



has an underlying music-festival vibe and has a mix of ensembles like crop tops, mini dresses enhanced with floral, marble and graphic prints mixed with elements like track pants and sneakers. "This fresh and new spring/summer line is based on palette of grey, charcoal, black, white, cobalt, royal blue, wine red, pink, neon and shades of blush," says Sinha.

Think fresh faces and statement lips with unkempt bold brows and the no makeup trend continues to reign this season also but with a lot of textures and matte finishes and pastel shades like lavender, lilac, aubergine and the season's new marsala.

"Marsala is a matte deep brick red colour which is lighter than red but darker than pink. It is the best suited colour for Indian skin. The make-up this season is more about balancing with dark eye-shadow nude lips are in style and with loud lips no eye-shadow is in vogue," says Taneja, a Guinness World record holder and expert on beauty. With the mercury rising, the day-to-day beauty routine too requires modification. With all the heat and sweat, the last thing one needs is to worry, says Taneja, is about blotchy makeup and smudged kajal, which accentuates dark circles and that makes the eyes look tired.

"Graphic eyeliners are hot sellers of the season and was quite visible at the recent fashion weeks both nationally and internationally. You can wear it anywhere from college to office to party to weddings. Cobalt blues and emerald greens give nice shape to eyes," says Taneja.



hot in swimwear collection. Solids and yarn dyed checks casual shirts, printed t-shirts and denims are trending in men's fashion," says Varma.

Jabong launched its spring/summer collection recently with brands

like Tom Tailor and Miss Bennett London.

The summer designs of Tom Tailor get their inspiration from very different places around the world. The collection of Miss Bennett London

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## Textile sector gears up for mass training activity

Programme to take place across 500 centres in the country on May 25

### LN REVATHY

Coimbatore, May 5

Textile Sector Skill Council (TSC) has begun collating data from the mill sector to understand the industry's job role training requirement, for submission to the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC).

### Awareness

TSC Chief Executive JV Rao, who was in the city recently, told *BusinessLine* that with the skill training syllabus (for 56 job roles) in place, training providers could start their activities from next month (the syllabus was prepared by consultants in consultation with 400-odd technical people from 180 mills, Rao said).

The Council, in the mean-

time, is in the process of creating awareness among the mills regarding the need to enrol themselves to become training providers, and thereby avail the benefit of government schemes.

Rao held discussions with the Managing Directors of 98 mills in the Western region of Tamil Nadu and apprised them about the enrolment and affiliation process.

On the sidelines of this event, he said that every mill has a training department, but the objective of the Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), the flagship skill development scheme, is to encourage standardisation in the certification process and create a registry of skills. TSC has developed a protocol

for a training development mechanism.

"The efforts are aimed at increasing the productivity of the existing workforce and aligning the training and certification to the needs of the industry.

"But the challenge for the Council at this juncture is in getting the mills to enrol as training providers with specific data projections. The skill training is expected to be kick started across 500 centres in the country on May 25. The pilot launch of activities is to happen in 250 districts," Rao said.

Meanwhile Texpreneurs Forum, which is a body of like-minded textile entrepreneurs, is acting as a facilitator in this drive.

The Forum's Secretary Prabhu Damodharan said that 98 mills in this part of Tamil Nadu had submitted

their application to the TSC through the Forum to be training providers in this drive.

The training will include soft skills, personal grooming, behavioural change for cleanliness and good work ethic as part of the curricula, the TSC CEO explained, and said that to ensure that the system does not get exploited biometric authentication has been introduced.

"There will be three types of training such as for freshers, multi-skilling and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) concept, wherein, a worker's skill, which was hitherto not recognised, will be assessed for getting monetary award."

