

- National Craft Council to stage Shilpa Udana National Crafts Festival 2014, themed 'Sustaining Livelihoods and Encouraging Revival'

Home to a rich heritage of traditional arts and crafts, Sri Lanka has always given pride of place to the artisans and craftspeople of its heartland. Sri Lankan arts and crafts have been admired over the years internationally.

The Crafts Council of Sri Lanka, headed by Chairman Buddhi Keerthisena, under the aegis of the Ministry of Traditional Industries and Small Enterprise Development, has consistently been committed to the upliftment and sustenance of craftspeople.

The National Crafts Council continues to empower crafts men and women, in its mission towards ensuring that the arts and crafts remain relevant and in existence.



Sustained by ancient art

From beautifully-woven handlooms to reed based utensils, pottery, expertly crafted batik, woodwork, masks, brassware, exquisite gold and silver jewellery, inlaid with stones and leather goods, the craftspeople have been engaging in their ancient art for generations. The Council engages them in providing training, know-how, sourcing markets and enabling them to

showcase their produce and facilitate their presence at national and international levels.

The craftspeople are sustained by the products they make; their livelihood has often been passed down from one generation to another, keeping families fed. The survival of their families and keeping alive their craft is directly linked to patronising of their arts and crafts.

As traditional entrepreneurs proud of their inherited skills, they are now being introduced gradually to new markets and opportunities that would see their ware being incorporated beyond being standard souvenirs, a process facilitated by the National Crafts Council.

### Backbone of rural economies

The majority of the local craftspeople who engage in traditional arts are women. They feed their families with the income sourced from marketing their wares. In Sri Lanka, arts and crafts form the backbone of rural economies, second only to agriculture as a source of employment in rural economies.

“The importance of arts and crafts in the national context can never be overstated,” says Keerthisena. “As a part of the Government’s commitment towards this industry, we continue to stage several initiatives that empower and engage our craftspeople.”

Under the guidance of the Ministry of Traditional Industries and Small Enterprise Development, the National Crafts Council of Sri Lanka plans to stage its apex event Shilpa Udana, the National Crafts Festival 2014 from 28 to 31 August at the BMICH.

### Shilpa Udana 2014

Shilpa Udana will showcase the talents and skills of Sri Lanka’s award winning artisans and craftspeople representing different regions from north to the south, under the theme ‘Sustaining Livelihood and Revival of Traditions’.

Shilpa Udana handicrafts exhibition, competition and trade fair is being held with splendour and pageantry, along the lines of other internationally-renowned crafts festivals such as the Surajkund Crafts Festival famously held in Haryana India.

Shilpa Udana will also facilitate new markets and buyers for craftspersons, introduce new designs, organise exhibitions, conduct awareness programs for traditional artisans and craftspeople and empower the craftsmen and women in general.

### Crafts Alive



To complement the Shilpa Udana and to ensure the continuous usage of arts and crafts in everyday living, Colombo Fashion Week plans to stage 'Crafts Alive,' a unique fashion initiative that will see the traditional crafts incorporated as fashion accessories, says Ajai Vir Singh, Founder of Colombo Fashion Week.

'Crafts Alive' will feature recognised Sri Lankan designers Ramona Oshini, Dharshi Keerthisena, Indeewari Yapa Abeywardena, Arugam Bay, ARRA by Sharmila and Upeksha. It will see fashion blend in crafts to add a new dimension to reviving the arts and crafts of Sri Lanka.

“'Shilpa Udana 2014' promises to be an occasion, we believe, that will take arts and crafts of Sri Lanka to the next level. Being incorporated into fashion created by Sri Lankan designers is a unique occasion for our arts and crafts – it also means that the craftspeople will have an additional source of income in the long term, making them secure in their livelihood,” says Keerthisena.