

MANTHAN FOR GREATER EPCH

Brain Storming and Ideation sees Indian Handicraft Industry Premiers formulate Vision 2035



THINK TANK: *Dr. Neeraj Khanna*, Chairman, EPCH; *Mr. Sagar Mehta*, Vice Chairman, EPCH; *Dr. Rakesh Kumar*, Director General in the role of Chief Mentor, EPCH & Chairman IEML; *Mr. Avdesh Agarwal*, Chief Convenor, EPCH along with former Chairmen, EPCH and members of Committee of Administration

16th October 2025: 'Manthan' a brain storming and ideation for Greater EPCH was organised as a high-energy interactive session with member exporters, buyers and other stakeholders to create an expanded EPCH 'Vision 2035' with focus on new markets & product categories, buyer-acquisition programs, digital services, sustainability & compliance support, logistics and finance enablement, etc. The Think Tank included Dr. Neeraj Khanna, Chairman, EPCH; Dr. Rakesh Kumar, Director General in the role of Chief Mentor, EPCH & Chairman IEML; Sagar Mehta, Vice Chairman, EPCH; and Avdesh Agarwal, Chief Convenor, EPCH. Other industry leaders including former EPCH Chairmen like, Mr. Ravi K Passi, Mr. Raj K Malhotra, Mr. O P Prahladka, Mr. Lekhraj Maheshwari and Mr. D Kumar participated and offered experience based valuable insights for shaping the future of EPCH and the handicraft sector as a whole. Mr. R K Verma, Executive Director, EPCH; Mr. Rajesh Rawat, Additional Executive Director, EPCH and senior officials of EPCH were also present. Besides participation from the handicraft exporting trade, there was notable presence of next generation and young exporters symbolising 'young bloods - the sign of continuity of legacy', who also engaged with the gathering and shared their opinions.

"4 decades of Made for global, available to global - from Cottage Industry to Global Mainstream"

Dr. Rakesh Kumar, Director General in the role of Chief Mentor, EPCH & Chairman IEML



as a credible platform to promote Indian handicrafts & craftsmanship excellence, globally. He highlighted the evolution

Sharing EPCH's journey of nearly four decades in being the bridge between India's craft traditions and the world's markets and his privilege of walking this journey for more than thirty years, Dr. Rakesh Kumar touched upon the journey of the Council with 27 exporters and its present growth to represent over 11,000 members and countless artisans, serving

of India's handicrafts sector, from cottage clusters to international markets and landmark initiatives such as IHGF Delhi Fair, VRIKSH certification, Common Facility Centres as well as design and testing infrastructure. He acknowledged Mr. R K Verma, Executive Director, EPCH's equally long journey and support throughout. Speaking on the present global market situation, he mentioned of India's small share of USD 3.9 billion despite the global USD 700 billion handicrafts market. Citing heavy dependence on the US market, modest growth, fragmented production and rising compliance demands, Dr. Kumar made an emphatic call for structural reform with the active participation of the young generation- the "Cubs of EPCH," rather than incremental change for the Indian handicraft exports sector, unveiling the Greater EPCH Vision.

The Way Ahead: Greater EPCH

EPCH's future vision, Dr. Rakesh Kumar emphasised, extends to 2035, with defined goals to strengthen financial growth, restructure its operations, and widen its market reach. It will be an ecosystem-centric transformation built on two pillars: **A Decentralised Three-Tier Governance Model** - Regional, state, and city chapters will enhance responsiveness, representation, and ground-level engagement. **Cluster++ Framework** - A hub-and-spoke model connecting major clusters like Moradabad, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Panipat and Narsapur with smaller adjoining clusters. Each hub will house a Business Development Centre providing services such as registration, GST support, logistics, design libraries, digital onboarding, and market intelligence.

The organisation aims to reach \$9 billion in targeted business growth while entering the \$300 billion global market. To support this, EPCH plans to provide financial and training assistance to small vendors through a new skill committee that will train about 20 lakh individuals. The Council also aims to develop regional offices and a mini-secretariat for better coordination, supported by 16 experts who will handle diverse product categories. Major handicraft hubs such as Moradabad, Jodhpur and Jaipur will be strengthened with end-to-end supply chains and open skill centres to ensure smooth operations and skill development.

A strong emphasis is placed on **artisan welfare and skill development**. Through initiatives like 'Karigari Samrakshan,' EPCH seeks to preserve traditional craftsmanship while enhancing artisans' skills. CSR funds and government schemes such as PM Vishwakarma Kaushal Samman (PM-VIKAS) will be utilised to empower artisans. Around ten large and forty small **clusters have been identified to create strong production bases**, each expected to generate about 7.5 lakh employment opportunities.

In terms of market and buyer strategy, EPCH **aims to strengthen long-term relationships with buyers** by shifting focus from trading to direct manufacturing links. The system will follow a Just-in-Time approach, ensuring efficiency and reliability. Programs such as the EPCH Retail Pavilion and "Aurran" will promote private label products and ensure consistent product availability.

The Indian handicraft sector holds a unique advantage in a world dominated by machine-made goods. EPCH aims to leverage this strength by transitioning from a cottage industry model to a more structured and scalable industrial framework. This evolution will allow Indian artisans and exporters to combine creativity with modern business practices, securing India's position as a global leader in handmade artistry.

Reviving Momentum and Market Expansion

Dr. Neeraj Khanna, Chairman, EPCH



The discussion moved to IHGF Delhi Fair's current status, leadership changes and future plans. Against the backdrop of the current market scenario efforts are being made to explore new markets and expand international ties, with delegations from Saudi Arabia and Russia showing interest. Exhibitors who invested heavily in their product presentations are seeking stronger support and motivation.

Dr. Neeraj Khanna envisioned to bring back positivity and enthusiasm. Having visited Germany, Greece, and Saudi Arabia, he aims to **apply global best practices to improve the fair's standards**. Emphasising that young skills are vital for the present industry, he introduced the "Manthan" initiative to engage with the younger generation's business ideas and expectations.

Despite the slowdown, the organisation remains optimistic about **achieving the dream of a cooperative EPCH**. The upcoming February show is expected to be much improved. Interactive sessions such as Q&As and quizzes are planned to encourage greater participation and communication. Under Dr. Khanna's leadership, the focus will be on positivity, collaboration and innovation to make future fairs more vibrant and impactful.

Go Global with Confidence, Strengthen Brand India

Sagar Mehta, Vice Chairman, EPCH



He shared an inspiring vision to take India's handicraft industry to new heights. His dream is simple yet bold – to **make the world see India as “The Home of Handicrafts”** and push the industry's export value to an incredible \$9 billion. To make this happen, he believes the industry needs to **evolve with**

time and think bigger. The first step, he said, is to cut out the middlemen and connect directly with buyers abroad. This not only gives artisans and exporters better control over their products and prices but also ensures that the real creators, the craftsmen, get the reward they truly deserve. The next move is to go global with confidence. Instead of limiting themselves to old, familiar markets like the US or Europe, the plan is to reach out to new regions like

the Middle East, Eastern Europe, East Asia, Africa, and Latin America and **claim a strong share of these growing markets.**

But the heart of the vision lies in building 'Brand India'. The world to not just buy Indian handicrafts, but feel their story, the tradition, the skill, and the passion behind every handmade piece. Through smart branding and storytelling, he hopes to make Indian craftsmanship stand out on the world stage. In essence, Mr. Mehta's vision is clear: Indian handicrafts are ready to take the global stage. By embracing smarter business strategies, forging direct connections with international buyers and showcasing rich heritage and skill behind every creation, India can transform its timeless craft traditions into a worldwide success that resonates with both hearts and markets.

EPCH: Each Person Collectively Holds 'responsibility'

Avdesh Agarwal, Chief Convenor, EPCH



The discussion focused on IHGF Delhi Fair's current status, leadership changes and future plans - a role of mentor perfectly done for a greater EPCH. "We would like every person to be responsible for a collective good."

Interactions with Young Invitees

The 'Manthan' had next-gen exporters among the audience who voiced their thoughts and ideas. They emphasised that the domestic market must now become a core focus, with exporters beginning to design specifically for Indian consumers. One second generation exporter with international exposure and training in Italy, noted that ancient Indian crafts should be globalised while also being adapted to the local market. A first-time exhibitor who won a Best Display award at this fair shared how live crochet weaving became the focal point of her display. Another spoke about developing an incubator design centre and stressed that collaboration with new designers is essential for future growth. A regular exhibitor focused on product mixing and packaging, integrating international-style combinations, which has yielded positive results. Another emphasised the importance of meeting compliance standards and maintaining high factory benchmarks, stating that buyers are drawn to companies that are compliant and well-prepared for new challenges. The evening ended with a Q&A. ■

