

# In the heritage hot seat

*The National Museum's newly appointed administrator has his work cut out for him*



Malini Nair | TNN

From agriculture to culture is a long haul even for a battle scarred bureaucrat. But CV Ananda Bose who took the hot seat as the first administrator of the long-forsaken National Museum, says he means to take it one day at a time.

"My mandate is to get the museum back on the rails and I have a wealth of recommendations from experts on what needs to be done," says Bose who has set himself a target of 100 days, starting Friday, 15th October, to spruce up the housekeeping.

There are problems galore. A staggering 109 posts lie vacant. Given its size and treasures — 20,000 artefacts, of which only some are on display for lack of manpower — the museum could do with all the staff it can get. Twenty of the museum's 27 sections are open to the public. The building has structural problems, especially leakage. For a long time now, the museum has been headed by a joint secretary in the ministry of culture. The last bureaucrat to head the institution was Dr V S Madan, a joint secretary in the ministry who held additional charge as the director general of the National Museum. The lack of a dedicated head has meant no long-term vision for a long time.

The effects are there to see. Digitisation, which is absolutely imperative for the conservation of rare and precious manuscripts, has yet to happen. The signage is old and unhelpful. Visitors pretty much have to fend for themselves. There are issues of humidity and temperature control that need looking into.

However, what is perhaps most depressing is the museum's take-it-or-leave-it air. It simply does not reach out and engage with visitors. "The museum has to become a focus for cultural exchange and we definitely need outreach programmes to interest people in its activities," says Bose. Recently, it tried to do so during the just-concluded Commonwealth Games with an exhibition of artefacts that dealt with sports.



CV Ananda Bose

**The National Museum has multiple problems like shortage of trained staff, building defects and a take-it-or-leave-it air. Bose's mandate is to get the place back on the rails**

The ministry of culture, of which the prime minister is in charge, had been looking for a professional museologist to head the institution. Having drawn a blank, it appointed Bose, with sole charge of the museum, and as an administrator. The search for a professional continues in the meantime.

Bose says he is not rattled. "I refuse to get intimidated by any assignment. I take a while to understand how I can get it done in the shortest possible time and then proceed to do it. I am open to advice from domain experts," he says.

He is no stranger to controversy. His last posting as managing director of the corruption-prone NAFED was fraught with confrontation. Just months ago, he was arbitrarily sacked by the federation's boards, which are mainly made up of politicians. He was accused of misusing funds. The agriculture ministry reinstated him barely a week later, clearing his name and reaffirming his mandate to clean up the NAFED stables.

"I seem to be the obvious choice for problem posts," quips Bose who continues to head the Kochi based Coconut Development Board. But the bureaucrat is not all that alien to the world of heritage. With a doctorate in habitat technology and environment from BITS, he had steered the low cost housing project in Kerala, Nirmitee Kendra, using vernacular architectural techniques.

## MUSEUM FACTS

- Established August 5, 1949
- Initially housed in Rashtrapati Bhawan
- Moved to its current location on December 18, 1960
- Houses 2 lakh works of art
- Displays over 5,000 years of India's cultural heritage