

Digital adventures at science museum

A glacier with penguins, a cute humanoid robot and a virtual reality gaming kiosk are awaiting kids in Ballygunge this summer. The Birla Industrial and Technological Museum will open a Digital Adventure Gallery with all these attractions next month to set off its diamond jubilee celebrations.

The 2,400sq ft gallery will be opened on May 2, when the BITM completes 60 years. The institute, known for its regular science workshops and summer camps for children, is part of the National Council of Science Museums under the Union ministry of culture.

"But this is going to be a first-of-its-kind gallery in eastern India. The gallery, built at a cost of a little less than Rs 1 crore, has been in the making for a year. We are giving finishing touches," said V.S. Ramachandran, the director of BITM.

"Though primarily for children, adults will also find the gallery entertaining," said the director. The gallery will have around 15 exhibits. **Metro** takes a sneak peak



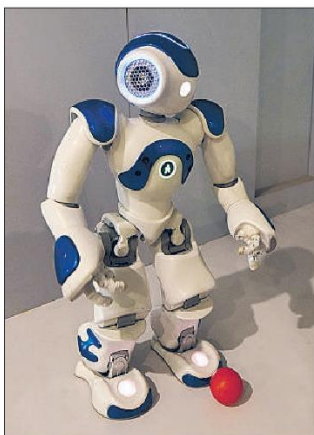
GIANT SCREEN

A giant screen, based on augmented reality, shows images of glaciers, oceans and ice-beds with penguins, whales and polar bears. Augmented reality is a technology that superimposes a computer-generated image on a user's view of the real world, merging the two and providing a composite view. Examples of augmented reality experiences include Snapchat lenses and the game Pokemon Go. Standing in front of the giant screen, 11 ft wide and 8 ft long, a viewer finds herself in the middle of the glacier, almost touching the penguins.



GAMING KIOSK

The virtual reality gaming corner should also be a hit among children, said BITM officials. Virtual reality is the use of computer technology to create a simulated environment. The trick is in a headgear that a player will have to wear. The gear transports the player into the world of the game, creating an immersive experience that shuts out the physical world. One of the games involves locating hidden treasures inside a large house with a swimming pool. Once a player puts on the head-mounted display, he or she feels like being present in the house. There are joysticks to control movement — front, back and sideways.

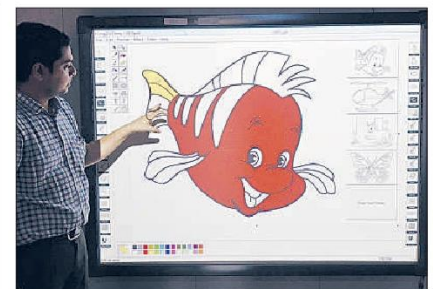


ROBOT

A small humanoid robot, no bigger than a three-year-old child, is going to be one of the star attractions of the gallery. The cute-as-a-button robot, imported from Japan for Rs 7 lakh, can talk, walk, dance and even play with a ball. While guiding this newspaper through the gallery on Thursday, curator Sudipto Saha asked the robot how old it was. Pat came the reply: "Nine years, sir. How time flies." "We plan to give it an Indian name," said director Ramachandran.

INTERACTIVE FLOOR

A portion of the floor turns into a digital gaming board. A projector and sensors mounted to the false ceiling right above controls the images displayed on the floor. There are 20 multimedia games that visitors can choose from — number-based games, house-building games and so on.



OTHER ATTRACTIONS

There is a digital drawing board with colour options. A sensor-based infographic screen that tells a story on the various forms of addiction, their side-effects and cure. The viewer has to sweep his or her hand over the sensor, without touching it, to flip the pages on the screen.

Reporting by Debraj Mitra, pictures by Pradip Sanyal