

SAARC CULTURAL CENTRE **NEWSLETTER**



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H.E. Md. Golam Sarwar, Secretary General of SAARC

Visit of H.E. Md. Golam Sarwar, Secretary General of SAARC to the SAARC Cultural Centre

Secretary General of SAARC H.E. Md. Golam Sarwar visited the SAARC Cultural Centre on Wednesday 12th June 2024. The event marked his first visit to Sri Lanka after taking over duties as the SAARC Secretary General. H.E. Md. Golam Sarwar was escorted to the SAARC Cultural Centre by the State Dance ensemble of the Department of Culture, Sri Lanka and Mrs. Renuka Ekanayake. Director, SAARC Cultural Centre warmly welcomed H.E. Md. Golam Sarwar. The Secretary General was accompanied by

Ms. Irosha Cooray, Director (ESC) of the SAARC Secretariat and Ms. Diana Perera, Assistant Director (SAARC) and other officials of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Sri Lanka. Director of the SAARC Cultural Centre thanked the Secretary General for his visit and his constant support for the Centre and its many activities. A presentation marking out all the activities and programmes conducted by the Centre since 2023 was made to the Secretary General.

News in Highlight



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Editorial

Welcome to the first issue of the SAARC Cultural Centre's Newsletter for 2024. As we embark on a new calendar year at the SAARC Cultural Centre, we are delighted to recap and present highlights of the programmes and activities of the SCC during the preceding months. We are pleased to announce that the SAARC Cultural Centre has been able to successfully implement a range of activities using its own resources and collaborative initiatives without any financial implications to the Centre. Therefore, at the outset, SCC would like to extend its heartfelt gratitude to Member States, their Embassies and High Commissions in Sri Lanka, various institutional partners for extending their support and patronage in all our activities. With an array of activities lined up over the course of next six months offering a variety of opportunities to engage with the Centre's activities and programmes, we hope that these activities would bring about greater benefits to people of South Asia. We invite you to read this newsletter and share with your networks.



H.E. Md. Golam Sarwar in his address reiterated the SAARC Secretariat's commitment and unequivocal support towards the activities of the SAARC Cultural Centre. He commended the dynamism of the Director and the staff of the Centre by highlighting that SCC has earned a name for being one of the most successful and vibrant SAARC regional centres. The Secretary General noted the unifying role played by culture in bringing people of the region and recognized the importance of culture in underpinning commonalities that bridge across differences. At the end of the event, a memento marking the visit was presented to the Secretary General by the Director. The Secretary General thanked the Director for the warm hospitality extended to him.

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-Editor

SAARC CULTURAL CENTRE











Deputy Director Programme, Bindu Urugodawatta delivering vote of thanks



Programme Assistant Harishnath Nadarajah compering



Secretary General of SAARC presenting memento to the Director, SCC



Director, SCC presenting memento to the Secretary General of SAARC



Renuka Ekanayake Director,SCC and Deputy Director Research Dr.Bina Gandhi Deori presenting the SAARC Cultural Journal Vol-8 to H.E.Md. Golam Sarwar, Secretary General SAARC



H.E.Md.Golam Sarwar, Secretery General of SAARC, Irosha Cooray, Director (ESC), Renuka Ekanayake, Director, SCC, Diana Perera, Assistant Director (SAARC) and the staff of SCC

SAARC Puppetry Day-Highlights

The SAARC Puppetry Day was introduced this year to highlight fast disappearing traditional entertainment of puppetry. The puppetry tradition in Sri Lanka uses handmade puppets using traditional techniques and methods passed down from generation to generation. This is an attempt by the SAARC Cultural Centre to ensure the intangible heritage of the puppetry traditions of Sri Lanka, both the art of making them and the tradition of using folk stories, Buddhist stories and others to entertain their audiences are brought alive and enjoyed by the SAARC Region.

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Renuka Ekanayake, Director,SCC welcoming Hon.Vidura Wikramanayake, Minister of Buddhasasana, Religious and Cultural Affairs, H.E.Bashu Dev Mishra, Ambassador of Nepal and Prof.Ankuran Dutta, Director, SVCC, High Commission of India, Colombo.

SAARC Puppetry Day -

The objectives of SAARC Puppetry Day was to re-introduce and revive Sri Lankan puppetry to Sri Lankans and share the beauty of this tradition and to provide an opportunity for the traditional puppeteers revitalize their craft and to document tangible and intangible heritage of puppetry and share it with the world.

This event was held at the Moon Bastion of the UNESCO World Heritage City of Galle on 5th April 2024. Two shows were organized with a school show at 3:00 pm and an evening show at 7:00 pm. The school show was extended until 5:30 pm due to requests from the school children and teachers who were enthralled by the puppetry show. During the two and half hour programme more than 2,000 school children watched segments of the Puppetry Show.

The evening event commenced with the dance of blessings (pooja dance) with a puppet offering a sheaf of betel leaves to H.E. Bashu Dev Mishra, Ambassador of Nepal to Sri Lanka. The comic relief item of the cart accident was especially enjoyed by the Sri Lankan audience. The highlight of the event was the two fire dance items that reflected the dexterity of the puppeteers in manipulating the puppets holding live fire in their hands. It was an enchanting sight to see the puppets showcasing the traditional dance items including the fire dance.



Renuka Ekanayake, Director SCC delivering the welcome address



Prof.Ankuran Dutta, Director SVCC, High Commission of India, Colombo



Deputy Director programme, Bindu Urugodawatta addressing the gathering



Hon.Vidura Wikramanayaka Minister of Buddhasasana, Religious and Cultural Affairs, Renuka Ekanayake, Director SCC and Ali eezan,Director Maldives Cultural Centre, Colombo





SAARC Puppetry Day _

Inauguration

The inauguration was held in conjunction with the SAARC Film Day. Hon. Vidura Wickramanayaka, Minister of Buddhasasana, Religious and Cultural Affairs attended this event as the Chief Guest. The other eminent guests who graced this occasion were H.E. Bashu Dev Mishra, Ambassador of Nepal to Sri Lanka, Prof. Ankuran Dutta Director of the Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre of the Indian High Commission in Sri Lanka, Mr. Ali Seezan, Director of Maldives Education and Cultural Centre in Colombo, Sri Lanka, Mr. Ranil Wickramasekara, Deputy Chief Secretary of the Southern Provincial Council of Sri Lanka, Dr. Nilan Cooray, Chairman of the Galle Heritage Foundation, Sri Lanka, Dr. B.D. Nandadeva, Retired professor of the University of Kelaniya in Sri Lanka, Mr. Sunil Dahanayake, Director of the Galle Heritage Foundation, Sri Lanka, Ms. P.G.N. Chandimali, Project Assistant, Galle Heritage Foundation, Sri Lanka, Ms. Sakuntala Meduwanthi Assistant Secretary representing the Cultural Secretary of the Southern Province Ministry of Culture, Ms. Wasanthi Alahakoon, Regional Assistant Director for Galle and Matara from the Department of Archaeology, other senior officials of the Southern Province, public and tourists.

Mrs. Renuka Ekanayake Director of the SAARC Cultural Centre delivered the welcome address and Dr. B.D. Nandadeva shared his immense knowledge on Sri Lankan String Puppetry, including the history, development and its importance as folk theatre of Sri Lanka to the audience. He further highlighted craft of creating the puppets and the rituals and details associated with the craft. The Deputy Director Programmes of the SAARC Centre Ms. Bindu Urugodawatte Cultural introduced each item of the Puppetry Show and delivered the vote of thanks. The evening show was broadcasted on the Facebook page of the SAARC Cultural Centre.



Prof.B.D.Nandadeva, Rt.Professor, University of Kelaniya and Dr.Nilan Cooray Chairman of the Galle Heritage Foundation Sri Lanka amongst the invited guests.



Scenes from the Puppet Show

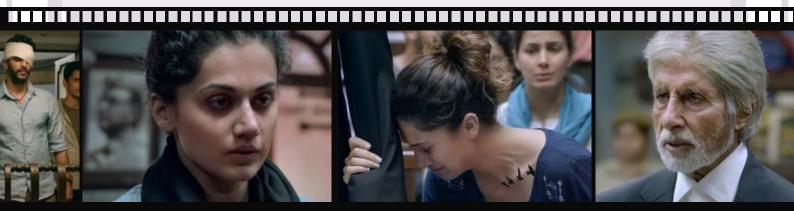


SAARC FILM DAY

The inauguration of the SAARC Film Day was held in conjunction with the SAARC World Puppetry Day. Prof. Ankuran Dutta, Director of the Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre joined this event as the Chief Guest representing H.E. Santosh Jha, the High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka. Mrs. Renuka Ekanayake Director of the SAARC Cultural Centre delivered the welcome address and Prof. Ankuran Dutta Director of the Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre in Colombo gave a brief introduction to the Indian Cinema and the movie "Pink".

The Film PINK directed by Mr. Aniruddha Roy Chowdhary and produced by Mr. Ronnie Lahiri was screened to a large gathering of enthusiastic audience. This movie with Mr. Amithabh Bachchan playing the lead role accompanied by Ms. Tapasee Pannu, Ms. Kirti Kulhari and Andrea Tariang playing the female leads addresses justice, social and cultural discrimination and double standards in the society faced by women.







The Fifty-ninth session of the SAARC Programming Committee Meeting

The Director, SAARC Cultural Centre, Ms. Renuka Ekanayake attended the Fifty-ninth session of the SAARC Programming Committee Meeting for Regional Centres (RC) and Specialized Bodies (SB) held in Kathmandu from 6th to 7th March 2024 at the SAARC Secretariat. This meeting was chaired by Ms. Rita Dhital, Joint Secretary (Regional Organizations Division), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Nepal.

Ms. Sewa Lamsal Foreign Secretary of the Government of Nepal and the Chairperson of the SAARC Standing Committee graced the occasion as the Chief Guest of the inaugural session of the Programming Committee. H.E. Md. Golam Sarwar, Secretary General of SAARC, National Focal Points of SAARC, Directors of SAARC Regional Centres and Specialized Bodies also attended the inauguration.

The Programming Committee reviewed the activities of the Regional Centres and Specialized Bodies and gave recommendations and finalized the budgets and Calendar of Activities of the SAARC Secretariat, Regional Centres and Specialized Bodies for 2024.

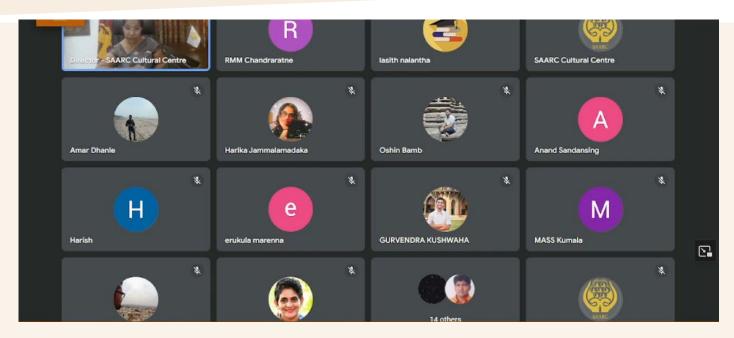


Director SCC presenting at the SAARC Programming Committee Meeting



Renuka Ekanayake, Director SCC at the Fifty Ninth Session of the SAARC Programming Committee Meeting

SAARC TALK SERIES 2024



SAARC Talk Series, initiated in 2023 is now into its second consecutive year. SCC has been able to bring experts in the field of culture from across South Asia to present and discuss on various aspects on South Asia's cultural heritage. SAARC Talk Series for the first half of 2024 brought speakers from Bangladesh, India, Bhutan, Maldives, and Pakistan.



Breaking the Spatiotemporal Boundaries of Continuity and Change: Thinking about Archaeology of Bangladesh Prof. Swadin Sen (Bangladesh)

The first session of the SAARC Talk Series 2024 (Virtual Mode) was held on (Tuesday), 30th January 2024, 3:00 pm (Sri Lanka Standard Time) at the SAARC Cultural Centre (SCC). The speaker of the first session was Professor Swadhin Sen, Department of Archaeology, Jahangirnagar University, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Professor Swadhin Sen delivered his lecture on the topic "*Breaking the Spatiotemporal Boundaries of Continuity and Change: Thinking about Archaeology of Bangladesh.*"

Prof. Sen elaborated on the Problematization, Perspectives and Questions of Time and Space, fundamental to the study and interpretation of past human societies and cultures in the context of South Asian archaeology. He highlighted the complexities of spatiotemporal dynamics beyond the binaries and asserted that continuity and changes in spatiotemporal scales are required to be negotiated with the rigorous and nuanced attention they deserve. During the Q & A session, there were several positive remarks from the audience who not only shared their insights on the subject but also appreciated the efforts of SCC for conducting such a meaningful academic engagement.



SAARC Talk Series 2024 _



Sacred Landscape of the Buddhist Monastic Sites of North-eastern Andhra Pradesh, India Dr. Shrikant Ganvir (India)

The second session of the SAARC Talk Series 2024 (Virtual Mode) was held on 20th February 2024 by the SAARC Cultural Centre, Sri Lanka. The speaker was Dr. Shrikant Ganvir, Assistant Professor, Department of Ancient Indian History Culture and Archaeology, Deccan College, Post-Graduate and Research Institute, Pune, India. In the presentation, Dr. Ganvir emphasised the importance of the role of landscape in the development of Buddhist monastic sites of North-eastern Andhra Pradesh such as Thotlakonda, Bavikonda, Salihundam and Sankaram. The lecture also addressed several questions such as understanding the nature of the associationship between laity and monastic establishments in this region and also explored the interactions between pre-Buddhist folk cults and Buddhist ritual practices at the monastic sites of the region.



The Relationship between Culture and Nature: A Bhutanese Perspective Mr. Samten Yeshi (Bhutan)

The third session of the SAARC Talk Series 2024 was held on, 13th March 2024. The speaker of the third session was Mr. Samten Yeshi. Mr Yeshi is a researcher within the European Research Council-funded project at the Leiden Institute for Area Studies, Leiden University, the Netherlands. Mr. Samten Yeshi delivered his lecture on The Relationship between Culture and Nature: A Bhutanese Perspective.

The lecture provided insight into the holistic worldview of the Bhutanese society, where the relationship between nature and culture is seen as inseparable and essential for the well-being of both the people and the environment. The speaker noted that while science contributes to our understanding of nature through innovations, the conservation of nature is dependent on people. People's lifestyles are shaped by the cultural, spiritual, and religious traditions they are born into. What impacts our environment and nature is directly dependent on human behaviour. Therefore, he stressed that the environmental conservation efforts, backed by scientific evidence, must adequately recognize this relationship.

SAARC Talk Series 2024



Maldives Cultural Music and Dances: Local and Regional Blend of Rich Performing Arts Traditions Dr. Aly Shameem (Maldives)

The fourth session of the SAARC Talk Series 2024 was held on 30th April 2024. Dr. Aly Shameem, Assistant Professor, Department of Social Sciences, Faculty of Arts, The Maldives National University, Maldives delivered a lecture on *Maldives Cultural Music and Dances: Local and Regional Blend of Rich Performing Arts Traditions.*

Maldives is an archipelago of over a thousand islands in the Indian Ocean. It has a rich and varied

performing arts tradition that reflects the country's multi-ethnic and multicultural society. Dr. Shameem elaborated on the important dance types of Maldives like *Body Beru* (Big drum), *Bandiya jehun* (Metal pot dance), *Tharak jean* (Fork Dance), *Bolimalaafaiy Neshun* etc. and their importance in the sociocultural life of the Maldivians. Dr. Shameem not only summarized the vibrant and diverse cultures of the island nation but also highlighted the deep meaning and significance that it holds for its people.



Documenting the Maritime Heritage of Pakistan Mr. Amer Bazl Khan (Pakistan)

The fifth session of the SAARC Talk Series 2024 was held on, 19th June 2024. The speaker of the fifth session of the SAARC Talk Series 2024 was Amer Bazl Khan, Director, MaritimEA Research, Karachi, Pakistan. Amer delivered a lecture on the topic Documenting the Maritime Heritage of Pakistan. Amer's talk highlighted the recent efforts to investigate and document Pakistan's maritime archaeology and underwater cultural heritage. It focused on understanding the maritime archaeological potential along the coastal regions of Sindh and Balochistan, the Indus River delta, and the extended cultural landscape beyond the coastal hinterland.

SAARC CULTURAL CENTRE





Director of the SCC presenting a memento to the High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka

The Director of the SAARC Cultural Centre Ms. Renuka Ekanayake paid a courtesy call on H.E. Santosh Jha,the High Commissioner of India to Sri Lanka on Monday 4th March 2024. He assured the High Commission of India's continuous support and assistance to the SAARC Cultural Centre. Ms. Ekanayake presented H.E. Santosh Jha with a memento as a token of appreciation.



Director of the SCC presenting a memento to High Commissioner of Pakistan

The Director, SAARC Cultural Centre paid a courtesy call on H.E. Faheem-Ul-Aziz High Commissioner of Pakistan to Sri Lanka at the Pakistan High Commission in Colombo on 14th June 2024. H.E. Faheem-Ul-Aziz pledged his support to the SAARC Cultural Centre and its activities. The director presented H.E. Faheem-Ul-Aziz with a set of publications of the SAARC Cultural Centre.



Director, SAARC Cultural Centre Ms. Renuka Ekanayake paid a courtesy visit to the High Commissioner of Maldives to Sri Lanka, H.E. Masood Imad. During the meeting, both sides discussed avenues to enhance cooperation in the preservation and promotion of culture and heritage among SAARC member states.

EVENTS ATENDED



53rd Bangladesh Independence Day

The Bangladesh High Commission in Sri Lanka celebrated its 53rd Independence Day of the People's Republic of Bangladesh at the Shangri-la Hotel on Tuesday, 26th March 2024. Director of the SAARC Cultural Centre, Ms. Renuka Ekanayake, Deputy Directors, Ms. Bindu Urugodawatte and Dr. Bina Gandhi Deori also attended the reception, in appreciation of the cooperation, strong and continued support extended by the High Commission of Bangladesh to the SCC.



Celebration of the Birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan

The SAARC observer state of Japan invited the Director of the SAARC Cultural Centre Ms.Renuka Ekanayake to the reception held in honour of the birthday of Hi Majesty the Emperor of Japan.

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EVENTS ATTENDED.



International Mother Language Day

The High Commission of Bangladesh in Sri Lanka celebrated the International Mother Language Day 2024 at Independence Square, Colombo on 21st February 2024. The SAARC Cultural Centre joined hands with the Bangladesh High Commission and in collaboration with the Roots of Lanka foundation hosted a performance of the SAARC Region showcasing the different dance types of the Region.



Invitation from Maldives Cultural Centre.

Deputy Director of Research, SAARC Cultural Centre, Dr. Bina Gandhi Deori attended the Vocal Workshop Closing Ceremony as Chief Guest organised by the Maldives Cultural Centre on 14th June 2024. Ali Seezan, First Secretary and the Director of Maldives Cultural Centre, Mohamed Haizoom Hussain, Third Secretary, High Commission of Maldives to Sri Lanka and Mr. Ibrahim Nifar, Lecturer (Music) were present at the occasion.



Pakistan National Day Celebrations on 26th April 2024

Director Ms. Renuka Ekanayake, SAARC Cultural Centre attended the Pakistan's National Day Reception on the invitation of the High Commissioner of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to Sri Lanka, H.E. Faheem Ul Aziz HI (M) on 25th April 2024. The reception was attended by a large number of dignitaries and officials.



Rabindra Jayanti Celebration, SVCC

Director and Deputy Director Research, SAARC Cultural Centre attended Rabindra Jayanti Celebration at SVCC, Colombo.



Commissioner of Bangladesh and the Ambassadors of Turkiye and Vietnam

Celebration of Bangla New Year 30th April 2024

Director Ms. Renuka Ekanayake and Deputy Director Research Dr. Bina Gandhi Deori, SAARC Cultural Centre attended the Bangla New Year celebration at the Bangladesh House, Horton Place on the invitation of the High Commissioner of Bangladesh to Sri Lanka.



ASSUMPTION OF DUTIES BY NEW PROFESSIONAL STAFF



Sonam Tenzin joined the SAARC Cultural Centre as Culture Specialist-Programme from 1st July 2024 for a period of 3 years. He was a Deputy Chief Archivist, Head of the National Museum of Bhutan, Department of Culture and Dzongkha Development before joining this office.



Apsara Karunaratne joined the SAARC Cultural Centre as Culture Specialist -Research in June 2024. Apsara has over 15 years of experience as researcher, project coordinator and research assistant. She previously worked at the SAARC Cultural Centre from 2011 to 2023 as Research Assistant contributing to a wide array of programmes, activities, and publication initiatives of the Centre. She holds a master's degree in International Relations from the University of Colombo.

NEW PUBLICATIONS

SAARC Cultural Centre released *SAARC Culture* Journal Vol-8 and Vol-9



SAARC Culture Journal Vol.8 on the theme of *Rites of Passage of the SAARC Region* has 11 articles that explore the rich diversity of customs, beliefs, and practices deeply rooted in the cultural and historical backgrounds of the South Asian communities.

SAARC Culture Journal Vol.9 is non-thematic and explores the endless dimensions of South Asian culture. The Journal contains 8 articles covering a wide range of topics from traditional knowledge, the relevance of the SAARC as an institution, rites of passage and beyond.

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS_

SAARC Cultural Center announced the Call for Abstracts for the 2024 Seminar on Intangible Cultural Heritage for Food Storage in the SAARC Region which aims at bringing together scholars from various fields of social sciences and humanities.

CALL FOR ABSTRACTS Seminar on Intangible Cultural Heritage for Food Storage in the SAARC Region		
Pakistan,September 2024 (Tentative)		
We invite scholars, researchers, educators and other interested parties to submit abstracts for the seminar. Abstracts are invited on topics that revolve around the following sub themes:		
 Traditional Techniques and Knowledge of Food Storage/Preservation Intersections of Food Storage/Preservation Practices with Cultural Identity and Heritage Oral Traditions Related to Food storage/Preservation Methods Sustainability and Resilience of Traditional Food Storage/Preservation Practices in the Modern World Gender Roles and Traditional Food Storage/Preservation Revival and Preservation of Endangered Food Storage/Preservation Practices Community-based Approaches to Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage Related to Food Storage/Preservation 		
20[™] JUNE 2024 Abstract Submission	25 [™] JUNE 2024 Notification of Acceptance	20[™] AUGUST 2024 Full paper Submission
SUBMISSION GUIDELINES		
 Abstracts must be written in English and should not exceed 350 words. (Include 3-5 keywords with the submission.) 		
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ANNOUNCEMENTS



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