



SAARC CULTURAL CENTRE NEWSLETTER



South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation

December 2024 | Vol. 14 | No. 2



STANDING LEFT TO RIGHT - Mr. Niluka Kadurugamuwa - DG, SAARC, (MOFA) Sri Lanka, Mrs. Renuka Ekanayake - Director (SCC), Mr. Md. Mizanur Rahman (Chairperson - Bangladesh), Mr. Ranjith Ariyaratne (Sri Lanka), Ms. Irosha Cooray - Director (ESC and Administration) SAARC Secretariat

ONLINE PARTICIPANTS - Ms. Nagtsho Dorji (Bhutan), Mr. Yash Veer Singh (India), Mr. Mohamed Shahuruzziyad (Maldives), Dr. Suresh Suras Shrestha (Nepal), Mr. Hassan Nasir Jamy (Pakistan)

Fourteenth Meeting of the Governing Board of the SAARC Cultural Centre concludes successfully in Colombo, Sri Lanka

SAARC Cultural Centre (SCC) hosted its Fourteenth Governing Board (GB) Meeting from 22nd-23rd October 2024 at the Cinnamon Grand Hotel, Colombo, Sri Lanka. The meeting was convened under the Chairmanship of Md. Mizanur Rahman, Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, People's Republic of Bangladesh. Governing Board Members of SAARC Member States participated both in person and virtually. The distinguished members who represented their esteemed Member States virtually at the Governing Board Meeting were Ms. Nagtsho Dorji, Director of the Department of Culture

& Dzongkha Development, Ministry of Home Affairs, Royal Government of Bhutan; Mr. Yash Veer Singh, Director of International Cultural Relations, Ministry of Culture, Republic of India; Mr. Mohamed Shahuruzziyad, Minister of State for Divehi Language, Culture & Heritage, the Republic of Maldives; Dr. Suresh Suras Shrestha, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Culture, Tourism & Civil Aviation, Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal, and Mr. Hassan Nasir Jamy, Secretary, National Heritage & Culture Division, Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

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40th SAARC Charter Day

Editorial

This year has been a remarkable one for the SAARC Cultural Centre, marked by significant achievements and vibrant cultural initiatives. With a fully staffed team, the Centre successfully organised an array of impactful programmes aimed at fostering cultural integration across the region. The latter half of the year was particularly eventful, featuring programs such as SAARC Film Days, the SAARC Talk Series, SAARC Special Lectures and SAARC Charter Day. These initiatives align seamlessly with our core mission: to promote regional unity through cultural integration and intercultural dialogue, and to contribute towards the preservation, conservation, and protection of South Asia's cultural heritage within the framework of the SAARC Agenda for Culture. The success of these endeavors was made possible by the unwavering support of SAARC Member States. As we conclude another eventful year, SAARC Cultural Centre takes this opportunity to extend our heartfelt gratitude to all who contributed to these accomplishments. Looking ahead, we shall remain committed to advancing peace and unity through culture. In 2025, SAARC Cultural Centre aims to create even more opportunities to bring the people of South Asia together, fostering exchanges of cultural heritage that strengthen our shared identity and regional harmony.

We look forward to embarking on another exciting year of cultural collaboration!

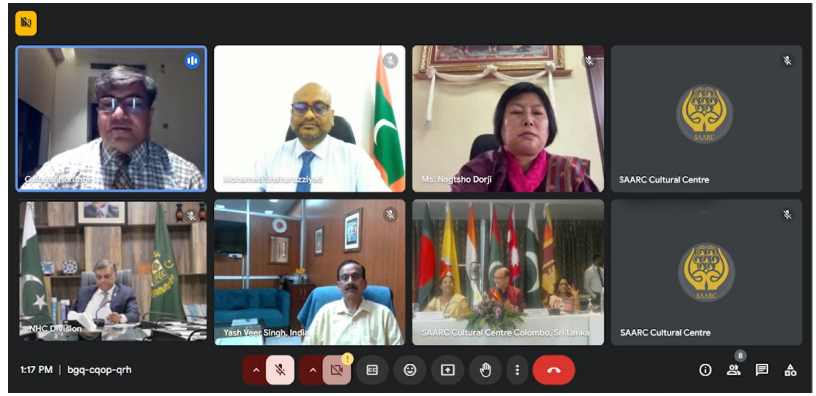
-Editorial Team



Mr. Ranjith Ariyaratne, Secretary of the Ministry of Buddhasasana, Religious & Cultural Affairs, Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, attended in person representing Sri Lanka. Ms. Irosha Cooray, Director of Education, Security & Culture (ESC), SAARC Secretariat, Kathmandu, Nepal represented the SAARC Secretary General, and Mrs. Renuka Ekanayake, Director, SAARC Cultural Centre attended as Member-Secretary. Mr. Niluka Kadurugamuwa, Director General (South Asia, SAARC & Public Diplomacy) also attended the meeting representing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sri Lanka.

The Meeting thoroughly reviewed the progress of activities implemented so far by the Centre and proposed new programmes for the next year for presentation at the forthcoming SAARC Programming Committee Meeting. Indicative programmes of the Centre for 2025 include an array of regular programmes across the mandated areas including performing arts, visual arts, archaeology, ancient material culture, museology, literature, folklore and folk culture, poetry, and diminishing arts. Meeting concluded successfully with observations and recommendations from the GB Members and the Board congratulated the SAARC Cultural Centre for its achievements.





Annual Joint Audit of the SAARC Cultural Centre



The SAARC Joint Audit Team (JAT23) conducted the annual joint audit of the SAARC Cultural Centre from 29th-30th July 2024. The joint audit reviewed the activities of the SAARC Cultural Centre for the financial year 2023. The audit team was composed of Mr. Sajid Mehmood Raja, Director General (Accounts) from the Controller General of Accounts

(CGA) Office and Mr. Arshad Ali, Director (FAO Wing), from the Office of the Auditor-General of Pakistan, Islamic Republic of Pakistan; Ms. Kalpana Aryal Pokhrel, Director and Ms. Kripa Marhattha, Audit Officer, from the Office of the Auditor General, Kathmandu, Government of Nepal.



Vishka

SAARC Cultural Centre, Colombo, Sri Lanka organised the SAARC Film Day at Liberty Scope Cinemas featuring the screening of the Maldivian film *Vishka* directed by Ravee Farooq on 31st July, 2024. The film, originally released in 2017, explores the psychological battle between good and evil. The event attracted a large audience, including the Maldivian community in Sri Lanka. It was inaugurated by Ms. Haleemath Sizna, Minister Counsellor at the Maldivian High Commission in Sri Lanka. She was presented with a token of appreciation by Mrs. Renuka Ekanayake, Director, SAARC Cultural Centre. Dignitaries in attendance included representatives from various cultural centres and organisations.





Bulbul and Prasad

Two movies from Nepal, *Bulbul* and *Prasad* were screened at the Jaffna Cultural Centre Auditorium, on 11th September 2024 as part of SAARC Film Day. *Bulbul* is a drama film written and directed by Mr. Binod Paudel and *Prasad* is a Nepali social drama directed by Mr. Dinesh Raut. The event was graced by Mrs. P.S.M. Charles, the Governor of Northern Province, Jaffna and the Guest of Honour was Mr. Sagar Bhandari who represented the Embassy of Nepal in Sri Lanka. A large number of film enthusiasts including students and faculty members of the University of Jaffna and other government institutions were present at the screening of the movies.



Chalay Thay Saath

SAARC Cultural Centre held another successful Film Day as part of its quarterly Film Day programme featuring the renowned Pakistani movie, *Chalay Thay Saath*, directed by Mr. Umer Adil at the Kandy City Centre Multiplex on 4th December 2024. The Film Day was inaugurated by Mr. G.H.M.A. Premasinghe, Chief Secretary of the Central Province, Kandy, who graced the occasion as the Chief Guest. Mrs. Renuka Ekanayake, Director of the SAARC Cultural Centre, in her welcome address, emphasised the importance of protecting and promoting the rich visual arts heritage of South Asia. As a token of appreciation, the Chief Guest was presented with a memento by the Director, SAARC Cultural Centre. The event was attended by distinguished guests, including representatives from the Maldivian Cultural Centre, Sri Lanka, Secretary General of the Temple of the Sacred Tooth Relic, officials from the Ministry of Buddhasasana, Religious and Cultural Affairs, members of the Kandy Municipal Council, academics and students from the University of Peradeniya.



SAARC SPECIAL LECTURE SERIES 2024

SAARC Special Lecture Series, initiated in 2023, has now entered its second consecutive year. The SCC conducts these special lectures in both physical and virtual formats, aiming to facilitate cultural dialogue and understanding among the SAARC Member States. In the second half of 2024, seven special lectures were conducted featuring speakers from Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. All SAARC Special Lectures are available on: <https://www.youtube.com/saarcculturalcentre>.



VERNACULAR HOUSES OF BHUTAN A HERITAGE OF THE PEOPLE

SPEAKER

MR. YESHI SAMDRUP

Chief of Heritage Sites and Archaeology Division
Department of Culture and Dzongkha Development
Bhutan



The first SAARC Special Lecture for 2024 was held on 18th September 2024. The speaker of the SAARC Special Lecture, Mr. Yeshe Samdrup, Chief Architect at the Heritage Sites and Archaeology Division, Department of Culture and Dzongkha Development, Bhutan delivered a lecture on ‘**Vernacular Houses of Bhutan: A Heritage of the People**’. The lecture primarily focused on insights from decade-long research collaboration between Bhutan’s Department of Culture and Dzongkha Development and the Tokyo National Research Institute for Cultural Properties.

The lecture delved into the rich legacy of Bhutanese vernacular houses, focusing on the typology of traditional buildings in Bhutan, chronological and regional features, construction methods and practices of traditional buildings, and the view of the Bhutanese public on the conservation of traditional buildings. The lecture emphasised the need for continued conservation and awareness, ensuring that future generations recognise and value this heritage of the people and Bhutan’s unique cultural identity.

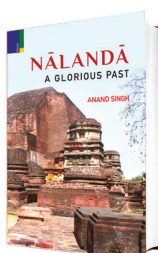


SAARC SPECIAL LECTURE AND MEET THE AUTHOR

SPEAKER

PROF. ANAND SINGH

Department of Historical Studies and Archaeology
Central University of South Bihar
Bihar, India



In Discussion with

VEN. PROF. MIRISWATHTHE WIMALAGNANA
Department of Buddhist Culture
Postgraduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies of University of Kelaniya
Sri Lanka

SAARC Cultural Centre in collaboration with Swami Vivekananda Culture Centre (SVCC), High Commission of India organised the second SAARC Special Lecture and Meet the Author on 18th October 2024 at the SVCC Auditorium. Prof. Anand Singh, Department of Historical Studies and Archaeology, Central University of South Bihar, India launched his book *Nālandā: A Glorious Past* which explores the historical significance of the ancient Nālandā Mahāvihāra and its contribution to the vast expanse

of knowledge and arts of Asia. Venerable Prof. Miriswaththe Wimalagnana, Department of Buddhist Culture, Post Graduate Institute of Pali and Buddhist Studies, University of Kelaniya conducted the discussion.

Prof. Singh outlining the synopsis of the book emphasised that Nālandā is not merely a historical site but a living tradition that has influenced cultures not only in the Indian subcontinent but also in the



SAARC Special Lecture Series 2024

regions like East Asia and Southeast Asia through the dissemination of Buddhist teachings and material culture. He discussed the broad curriculum at Nālandā which encompassed disciplines like medicine, astronomy and philosophy. He also referred to the emergence of a book cult in Nālandā that the university established an early model for library systems and manuscript preservation, making it a crucial centre for knowledge dissemination.

The event was attended by the H.E. Andalib Elias, High Commissioner of Bangladesh to Sri Lanka; Prof. Ankuran Dutta, Director, SVCC; Ahmed Ziyad, Third Secretary, Maldives High Commission to Sri Lanka; Dr B. Mozambi Goodarzi, Counsellor, Iranian Cultural Centre, Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran; Ms. Ruvini De Silva, Director (SAARC), South Asia & SAARC Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Sri Lanka and other distinguished guests.





**Understanding South Asia:
The Impact of Culture
on People to People Relations**

SPEAKER
Dr. Pramod Jaiswal
Research Director
Nepal Institute for International Cooperation
and Engagement
Nepal



The third SAARC Special Lecture titled ‘**Understanding South Asia: The Impact of Culture on People to People Relations**’ featuring Dr. Pramod Jaiswal, Research Director of Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement, Nepal was held on 29th October 2024. This lecture explored how cultural interactions—encompassing language, religion, art, and shared heritage—have influenced

relationships among South Asian nations and created a foundation for regional cooperation. By examining case studies of cross-border festivals, cultural exchange programs, and social media interactions, the speaker underscored the role of cultural diplomacy in enhancing mutual understanding and building trust among the people of South Asia.

SAARC Special Lecture Series 2024



HINDU-BUDDHIST INFLUENCES ON THE MUSLIM ART AND ARCHITECTURE IN ANCIENT GANDHARA, PAKISTAN

SPEAKER

PROF. DR. GHANI-UR-RAHMAN
Director
Quaid-i-Azam-University
Taxila Institute of Asian Civilizations
Islamabad, Pakistan



SAARC Cultural Centre hosted its fourth SAARC Special Lecture on 11th November 2024 by Prof. Dr. Ghani -Ur-Rahman, Director, Quaid-Azam-University, Taxila Institute of Asian Civilizations, Islamabad, Pakistan on the topic ‘**Hindu-Buddhist Influences on the Muslim art and architecture in Ancient Gandhara, Pakistan.**’ The lecture delved into the rich history and cultural exchange that took place in the ancient Gandhara region which holds a significant place in the history of South Asia. Because of its unique location, it has been a centre of vibrant cultural exchanges, particularly in the realm of art and architecture. Gandhara was a melting pot of various cultures and religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism

and Islam. He discussed the Hindu-Buddhist influences in Muslim art and architecture that can be seen in the symbolic motifs, architectural styles and religious iconography present in the ancient structures of Gandhara. He cited examples from the use of the images of turtles (myth from *Samudramanathan*), single and double *vajra*, sun, *stupa*, and *bodhi* tree; and the incorporation of these elements from both religions in the design of mosques and shrines. He further elaborated how these signs and symbols of Hindu-Buddhist origin continued in today’s Muslim art and architecture, mostly for decoration purposes, and the process has inevitably preserved the cultural continuity in Pakistan.



EARLY HISTORIC URBANIZATION AND URBAN-RURAL LANDSCAPES IN SOUTH ASIA

SPEAKER

DR. SELVAKUMAR VEERASAMY
Head of the Department
Department of Maritime History and Marine Archaeology
Tamil University
Tanjavur
India



SAARC Cultural Centre hosted the fifth SAARC Special Lecture titled ‘**Early Historic Urbanization and Urban-Rural Landscapes in South Asia**’ on 25th November 2024, featuring Dr. Selvakumar Veerasamy, Head, Department of Maritime History and Marine Archaeology, Tamil University, Tanjavur, India. The lecture began with a brief introduction to the concept of urbanisation, outlining its characteristics as proposed by Gordon Childe, citing examples from South Asia. Dr. Veerasamy mentioned that the Early Historic period, which is placed between 600 BCE and 300 CE in South Asia is marked by the rise of political formation, cities and new ideologies, development of script and new literary and textual compositions and material cultural traditions. Commercial activities involving craft production and long-distance maritime trade with the Indian Ocean region are seen as part of the ‘second urbanization’ as well as ‘proto

globalization.’ From Taxila to Tissamaharama and from Bharuch to Mahastangarh several urban centres and settlements in the rural landscapes witnessed these developments.

He also touched upon the social and economic dimensions of early historic urbanisation in South Asia, bringing attention to the complex socio-political structures that shaped the urban landscape. Dr. Veerasamy explained how the region’s cities have evolved over time, with a constant interplay between urban and rural spaces. The lecture delved into the intricate relationships between urban and rural areas, highlighting how they are not separate entities but rather interconnected and interdependent components of the larger urban system. One of the most intriguing aspects of the lecture was the speaker’s emphasis on the impact of ideologies and how they shaped urbanisation in South Asia.



SAARC Special Lecture Series 2024



SAARC Cultural Centre hosted its sixth SAARC Special Lecture by Ms. Ashwini Natesan titled '**Digital Renaissance: How Technology is Reshaping Culture**' on 9th December 2024. Ashwini Natesan is a Legal Consultant and Research Fellow- Tech, Media and Telecommunications Law, Sri Lanka.

Ms. Natesan discussed the transformative impact of digital technology on cultural practices and interactions in South Asia. In the context of Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR) she explained how immersive technologies can transcend geographical barriers, allowing users from around the world to experience SAARC's rich cultural

heritage. She explained how VR can be used to create virtual tours of heritage sites, cultural festivals, and historical reenactments, making them accessible to a global audience without the need for physical travel, providing a richer educational experience. One of the most intriguing aspects of the lecture was the balance between the use of AI and preserving the value of human creativity and diversity in culture. The lecture stimulated dialogue on the intersection of technology and culture within the SAARC Region, highlighting both opportunities and challenges posed by digital innovations.



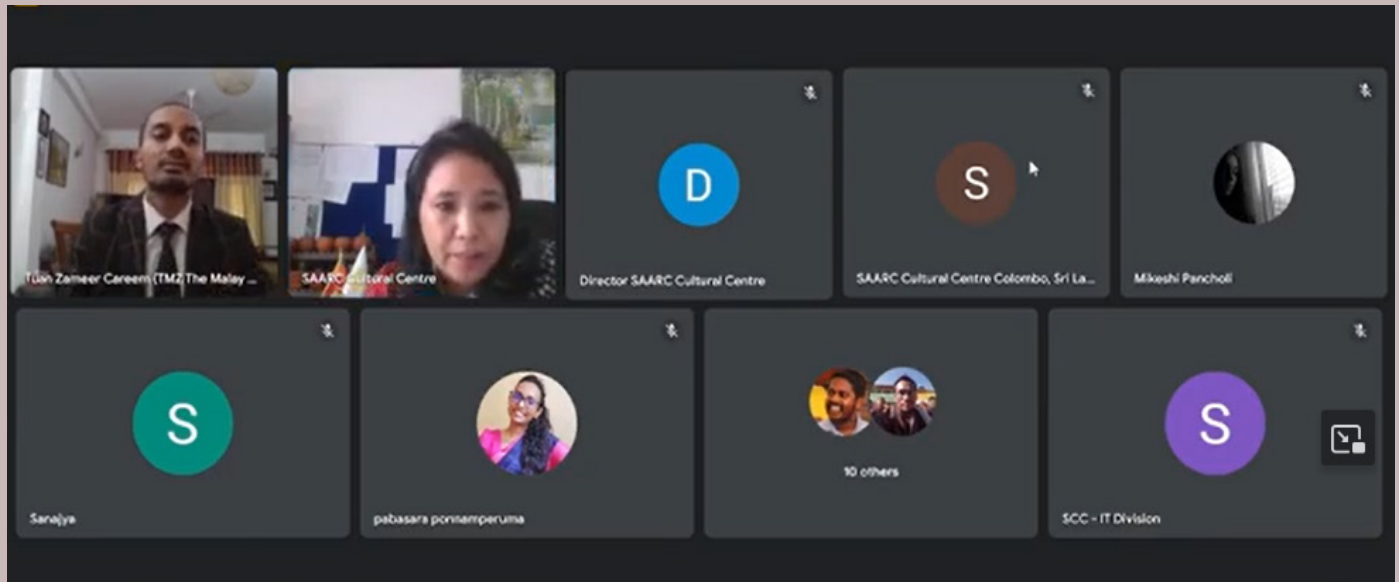
SAARC Cultural Centre hosted the seventh session of the SAARC Special Lecture 2024 on 13th December 2024. The speaker, Ms. Sulochana Dissanayake, Founder and Artistic Director of Power of Play (PVT) Ltd spoke on the topic '**Is puppetry relevant in the 21st Century South Asia?**'

The lecture provided a comprehensive overview of how the craft of puppetry is deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of South Asia. She discussed the different types of puppets found across South Asia, string puppets/ marionettes (India, Sri Lanka), rod puppets (Bangladesh), giant puppets (Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka), muppets (Pakistan, Afghanistan), finger puppets, hand/gloved puppets, shadow puppets and body puppets.

The speaker paid tribute to the oldest living traditional puppeteer of Sri Lanka, Maestro Premin Ganvari from Ambalalangoda. She explained how puppetry reflects local traditions, folklore, and religious narratives. One of the key takeaways from the lecture was the understanding that in the modern context, puppetry is not just for entertainment but can be used in various forms to educate audiences, to address pressing societal issues such as gender equality, environmental issues etc or to be used as political satire to critique government policies. The lecture was demonstrative and interactive, online participants were fascinated to participate with much enthusiasm.

SAARC TALK SERIES 2024

SAARC Talk Series, initiated in 2023, has now entered its second consecutive year. The SCC conducts these talk series in virtual format, aiming to facilitate cultural dialogue and understanding among the SAARC Member States. In the second half of 2024, three talk series were conducted featuring speakers from Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. All SAARC Talk Series are available on: <https://www.youtube.com/saarcculturalcentre>.



Ramayan and Mahabharat Traditions in Nepal

SPEAKER

MR. AMISH RAJ MULMI
Writer, Nepal



The sixth session of the SAARC Talk Series 2024 titled '**Ramayan and Mahabharat Traditions in Nepal**' was held on, 10th July 2024. The speaker of the session was Mr. Amish Raj Mulmi, a writer from Nepal. Amish is the author of *All Roads Lead North: Nepal's Turn to China*. He is a visiting fellow at the Centre for Social Innovation and Foreign Policy and consulting editor at Writer's Side Literary Agency.

Amish discussed Nepal's Ramayan and Mahabharat traditions, traversing the country from the plains to the Kathmandu valley, and breaking down the diversity in belief and practice that makes South Asia a vibrant and inclusive cultural space. Amish stressed the rich diversity of such traditions, a testament to how South Asia interprets these canonical texts in their own beliefs.



SAARC Talk Series 2024



Bridging Beliefs: Saints as Symbols of Syncretism in South Asia

SPEAKER

DR. ZAMEER CAREEM
 Visiting Lecturer in International Relations
 Faculty of Management, Social Sciences and Humanities
 General Sir John Kotelawala Defense University (KDU)
 Sri Lanka



The seventh session of the SAARC Talk Series 2024 titled ‘**Bridging Beliefs: Saints as Symbols of Syncretism in South Asia**’ was held on 30th August 2024. The speaker of the session was Dr. Zameer Careem, a medical historian and visiting lecturer at General Sir John Kotelawala Defence University. The talk explored how saints, revered across different religious communities, act as bridges between Abrahamic and Eastern religions, promoting a shared spiritual identity. It highlighted the phenomenon of devotees from Eastern religions,

such as Hinduism and Buddhism, who seek blessings and intercession at Catholic churches and Islamic shrines. This practice illustrates the deep-rooted tradition of religious syncretism and coexistence that has long characterised South Asian society. Focusing primarily on examples from Sri Lanka and India, the talk extended its analysis to other South Asian countries, providing a broader understanding of how saint veneration functions as a symbol of religious unity in the region.



Paharpur: An Early Medieval River Port of North Bengal

SPEAKER

PROF. MD. MOZAMMEL HOQUE
 Department of Archaeology Jahangirnagar University
 Dhaka
 Bangladesh



The eighth and the final session of the SAARC Talk Series 2024 was held on 9th September 2024. The speaker, Prof Md. Mozammel Hoque delivered a lecture on the topic ‘**Paharpur: An Early Medieval River Port of North Bengal**’. The main objective of the talk was to examine the importance of Paharpur as a prominent trading hub during the early

medieval period. Though there is no historical record, Prof. Haque believes that observations based on geomorphology, river system, agricultural products, and archaeological remains, it can be assumed that Paharpur and Amair areas were functioning as an Early Medieval river port.

Courtesy Calls



Director of the SAARC Cultural Centre paid a courtesy call on the newly-appointed High Commissioner of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to Sri Lanka, H.E. Andalib Elias at the High Commission of Bangladesh, Colombo on 13th September 2024. They discussed ways to further enhance cooperation on cultural activities, and how the High Commission of Bangladesh can assist the SAARC Cultural Centre in organising its collaborative activities. Director, SAARC Cultural Centre expressed her profound gratitude to the High Commission and to the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh for the tremendous support extended in the SAARC Cultural Centre's activities for the past 14 years. H.E. Elias took note of the SAARC Cultural Centre's wish to continue its collaborative initiatives with the High Commission of Bangladesh in Sri Lanka in the celebration of International Mother Language Day and SAARC cultural festivals.



Dr. George I.H. Cooke, Executive Director of the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies (RCSS) met with the Director of the SAARC Cultural Centre on 14th August 2024. During the meeting they exchanged opinions on the potential for future collaboration and knowledge exchange.



Mrs. Druki Martenstyn, President of the SAARC Women's Association (SWA) in Sri Lanka met with the Director, SAARC Cultural Centre (SCC) on 6th August 2024. During the meeting, Mrs. Martenstyn expressed interest in collaborating with the SAARC Cultural Centre to implement SWA's various initiatives in Sri Lanka.



Mr. Norbu Wangchuk, Director General of South Asia Co-Operative Environment Programme (SACEP) met with the Director, SAARC Cultural Centre on 6th November 2024. They exchanged views on collaborative programmes on sustainable culture and environment in South Asia. The discussion concluded with the ideas on managing waste through the art and culture and sustaining traditions and promoting environmental conservation.

Courtesy Calls



Dr. Anuj Bhattachan, Director of the SAARC Tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS Centre (STAC), Nepal called on the Director of the SAARC Cultural Centre on 9th October 2024. The two Directors highlighted areas of mutual cooperation and assistance in the various ongoing activities of the two regional centres. SAARC Tuberculosis Centre (STC) was established in 1992 with the objective of prevention and control of TB HIV/AIDS in the Region by coordinating the efforts of the National TB Programmes and National HIV/AIDS Programmes of the SAARC Member States. Dr. Anuj Bhattachan assumed duties as the Director, STAC in October 2024. He has over 20 years of experience in the field of applied epidemiology, 5 years in clinical Development of Enteric Vaccines and several years of direct involvement in health system strengthening through various public health engagement in Nepal, Bangladesh, South Korea, Rwanda, India and Pakistan.

Events Attended



National Day of Vietnam

Mrs. Renuka Ekanayake, Director and Dr. Bina Gandhi Deori, Deputy Director (Research), SCC attended an event marking the 79th anniversary of the National Day of Vietnam hosted by H.E Trinh Thi Tam, Ambassador, the Embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam in Sri Lanka on 29th August 2024. The event showcased traditional Vietnamese music and dance.



National Day of Nepal

Mrs. Renuka Ekanayake, Director, SCC, (seen along with Prof. Ankuran Dutta, Director, SVCC), Sikdar Zulkernine, Deputy Director (Programmes), Dr. Bina Gandhi Deori, Deputy Director (Research), Sonam Tenzin, Culture Specialist (Programmes), and Mahinda Sumanasekara, Documentation Officer of the SAARC Cultural Centre attended the Constitution and National Day of Nepal hosted by the Nepal Embassy on 19th September 2024.

Bauls of Bengal for Peace and Harmony

The Bauls are a group of mystic minstrels who blend elements from various cultural traditions across Bangladesh and the neighboring Indian states of West Bengal, Tripura, and Assam's Barak Valley. In 2008, Baul songs were inscribed in the UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in recognition of its distinct identity and elements of cultural diversity, intangible cultural heritage, and its intrinsic value to the communities concerned. In recognition and appreciation of this as an intangible cultural heritage of South Asia, SAARC Cultural Centre welcomed a group of Baul singers by organising a special program on 22nd November 2024, from 3:00 to 4:30 pm at the SCC premises. The Baul team consisted of a professor, Baul researcher and a renowned Baul singer.



New Staff



Sikder Md. Zulkernine joined the SAARC Cultural Centre on deputation for three years on 01st August 2024 as Deputy Director (Programmes). Sikder Zulkernine holds Bachelor's (Hons.) and Master's in Archaeology from Jahangirnagar University, Savar, Dhaka, Bangladesh. Prior to joining the SAARC Cultural Centre, he was Professor in Archaeology, Department of Archaeology, Jahangirnagar University, Savar, Bangladesh.

Digital Documentation of Cultural Practices of the SAARC Region

In November 2024, SAARC Cultural Centre awarded a grant to M. A. Malak Milon from the People's Republic of Bangladesh for a documentary production on the traditional art of jute making in Bangladesh under SAARC Cultural Centre's programme on Digital Documentation of Cultural Practices of the SAARC Region. The theme for this year's documentation project, '**Rushes, Reeds, and Natural Fibers**', has been chosen to underscore the deep connection between traditional handicrafts and the sustainable livelihoods of the communities

involved in their production. By concentrating on these indigenous crafts, the initiative seeks to highlight not only their cultural significance, but also their role in supporting the economic well-being of artisans across the region. SAARC Cultural Centre strongly believes that documenting these crafts will play a pivotal role in preserving these traditions for future generations. Through this initiative, SAARC Cultural Centre aims to foster a greater understanding and appreciation of South Asia's rich cultural heritage while ensuring its sustainability for years to come.



M. A. Malak Milon is a photographer, documentary film maker currently working as senior photographer at the National Museum of Bangladesh. He holds a Master's and Bachelor's Degree in Social Science, Department of TV, Film and Photography from Dhaka University. Over the years he has directed numerous documentary films, including his notable works such as, *Curzon Haller Itikotha*, *Portrait*, and as director of photography in *Protiman*. These films have garnered attention for their powerful storytelling and their ability to throw light on important societal issues.





SAARC Cultural Centre celebrates the 40th SAARC Charter Day

Heads of State or Government of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka signed the SAARC Charter on 8th December 1985 in Dhaka, Bangladesh, establishing the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Since then, each year, SAARC Charter Day is celebrated across all Member States, Regional Centres and Specialized Bodies of SAARC affirming their unwavering support and commitment to the SAARC process of promoting the welfare of the peoples of South Asia and improving their quality of life through regional cooperation in mutually agreed areas.



This year's Charter Day of the SAARC Cultural Centre was celebrated on 8th December 2024 at Sofia City Hotel Colombo, with the attendance of dignitaries from High Commissions and Embassies of SAARC Member States in Colombo. On invitation of Director, SAARC Cultural Centre, Ms. R.S. Khan Azard, Additional Secretary graced the occasion as the Chief Guest representing the Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment and Tourism, Government of Sri Lanka. Amongst the distinguished invitees were: Mr. Md. Jannatul Habib, First Secretary, High Commission for the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Colombo; Prof. Ankuran Dutta, Director, Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre, representing His Excellency the High Commissioner of India; Mr. Adeel Sattar, Press Attaché representing His Excellency the High Commissioner of Pakistan; Mr. Esala Weerakoon, former Secretary General of SAARC and Dr. B M Goodarzi, Director, Iran Cultural Centre. Distinguished invitees were welcomed by traditional Kandyan dance and drum performed by the artists of the State Dance Ensemble of the Department of Cultural Affairs.

Mrs. Renuka Ekanayake, Director, SAARC Cultural Centre in her welcome address stated that SAARC Charter Day reminds us of the shared vision that brought our nations together, the vision of a South Asia where cooperation transcends boundaries and where unity prevails over division.

Felicitation messages from H.E. the President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Hon. Prime Minister of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka, Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Employment and Tourism and the Secretary General of SAARC- H.E. Md. Golam Sarwar were read out at the gathering. Dr. B.D. Nandadeva delivered the guest speech highlighting on the importance of safeguarding cultural heritage both tangible and intangible and avenues to be exploited and explored for the mutual benefit of all Member States of SAARC. Several other government officials and all SAARC Cultural Centre staff were also present at the occasion.



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