

SPOTLIGHT

The stage was set, the lights dimmed. Silence.

From backstage, you could hear the pounding of young hearts of those who are representing their country for the first time on a platform so majestic. The announcement began, "The group performing now is from Bangladesh."

The name- Bangladesh- struck all the right nerves. The hairs stood on their ends, and the tears were adamant to roll down. By then, every time the name Bangladesh was uttered, the heart beats grew faster. "This is it!" they thought in unison- an hour to prove to the world the grandeur of Bangladeshi theatre.

The participating schools get the rare opportunity to not only delve into new realms of theatre, but also learn, accept, and fall in love with new cultures. The festival was a unique and memorable experience for both students and faculty. The theme of this year's edition of the APB meet was 'The strength of Asia in Contemporary Performance Culture.' The union examined the contemporary performance culture in Asia, the elements of orthodoxy, modernisation and other factors that contribute to theatre in terms of content, form and style.

According to the Bangladeshi performance troupe, the experience was a life changing one. "It was a huge opportunity for us. It was a melting-pot of different cultures, and to be able to represent our country there along with them- it was an experience of a lifetime," says Esthiak Khan Pathan, one of the performers.

13 theatre schools from 10 countries of the Asia Pacific Region participated in the confluence.

"The bonds we created with the performers from the other countries were unimaginable, and something we will

cherish for the rest of our lives. For a lot of us, it was the first time we even went abroad. To go to a new land, meet new people and come back with lifelong friends who are passionate about the same thing - it was unreal," says Shawgatul Islam Himel, yet another performer.

"There were instances when we would hang out, play the guitar; a boy from Delhi, who speaks a different language, will hum along with our tunes- it was that shared passion we had for the art that created this friendship and made us comfortable with each other. Their hospitality was unparalleled- we even celebrated Diwali with them!" says Afrin Huda.

The performing team from Bangladesh on-stage consisted of Md Elius as the Narrator and Sydur Rahman Lipon, Kazi Tamanna Haque Sigma, Amit Chowdhury and all students-performers of this production as the Chorus & Crowd. The off-stage team consisted of Israfil Shaheen as the Director, Shahman Moishan for Dramaturge, Narratives and Lyrics, Ashiq Rahman Leon for Set, Light & Props Design, Wahida Mollick, Ashiq Rahman Leon, Kazi Tamanna Haque Sigma for Costume, Rahmat Ali for Make-Up Design, Sydur Rahman Lipon and Kazi Tamanna Haque Sigma for Music Composition, Amit Chowdhury for Movement, and all of the faculty members of The Department of Theatre and Performance Studies, University of Dhaka for overall cooperation.

Each day at the meet, plays put up by the participating schools presented at the festival included- Flat Heart by Indonesia, Sanjbelar Bilap by Bangladesh, The Identity of the Dead Butterflies by Iran, Loss of a Hometown



Dr. Israfil Shaheen (M) being honoured.



ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE: DU AT THE 9TH ASIA PACIFIC BUREAU

NAZIBA BASHER

PHOTO COURTESY: THEATRE AND PERFORMANCE STUDIES DEPARTMENT, DU

by South Korea, Your destiny by China, My Friend has Come by Philippines, Kiri Kanan by Malaysia, The Dream Response by Singapore, I am not the Person by Japan, and Reshmi Rupal by India.

The Bangladeshi team had presented the performance "Sanjbelar Bilap" (Delirium of Twilight) directed by Professor Dr. Israfil Shaheen at the Avimancha in NSD (National School of Drama) as the inaugural performance of this year's APB of Theatre Schools Meet Festival. Their performance has been acclaimed highly by esteemed academics, artists, directors, students, and invited guests. The festival was inaugurated by the eminent theatre director Ratan Thiyam and welcomed by the NSD director Professor Dr. Waman Kendre.

The play, "Sanjbelar Bilap" was a localised take on John Racine's *Phaedra*.

"We have not tried to adopt it but attempted to recreate it in terms of acting, scenography, music, movement as well as the textual intervention," says Israfil Shaheen, director, and professor of Department of Theatre and Performance Studies, University of Dhaka.

Every year, the APB festival has an elaborate learning programme for the participating schools. Apart from the performances, there were directors' meets, interactions, panel discussions and workshops. Each school had the opportunity to conduct a workshop for all other participants, offering a glimpse and experience of how their own schools work with theatre, their methodologies, and works, through a series of exercises for the participants.

Two workshops, titled "The ethnographic sensibility for acting", were conducted by Sydur Rahman Lipon,

Shahman Moishan, Amit Chowdhury, Asiq Rahman Leon and Kazi Tamanna Haque Sigma, from Bangladesh. In these workshops, students of NSD India and other participating countries were present. In two international seminars Shahman Moishan an Assistant Professor of the department presented two papers titled "What is Asian strength in contemporary performance practices?" and "The role of the text in contemporary theatre practice" -- held on 22nd and 23rd October, 2016.

This inclusion in the 9th APB was proof enough. It was proof that the theatre scene in Bangladesh has returned to the limelight and is back with passion, manpower, love for the stage and innovators, who are constantly working to raise the stage for themselves.

The stage has been set, the lights dimmed. Silence.

Bangladesh was, is and always will be ready to take on any stage by storm.



Dhaka University has been blessed with a thriving Theatre and Performance Studies department since 1994. A pioneering department under the Faculty of Arts, this department has shown that an educational institution, as a knowledge-producing hub, can perhaps never be an abstract standard of truth, but a source that seeks to generate a set of ideals in a group of humans – its students, staff and the faculty.

Israfil Shaheen is a bold voice for how training procedures can be incorporated in a production. "I believe not merely in a cultural production but in a cultivating process where theatre is not a production but a processual action," he says.