Established: 1984

Ajoka Newsletter

Jul 2022 - Sep 2022

Digital issue #10



Vision

Ajoka has been committed to the ideals of peace and tolerance, within Pakistan and in the region. Ajoka has collaborated with theatre activists from other countries of South Asia particularly from India & Bangladesh, even in times when any contact across the border was considered treason.

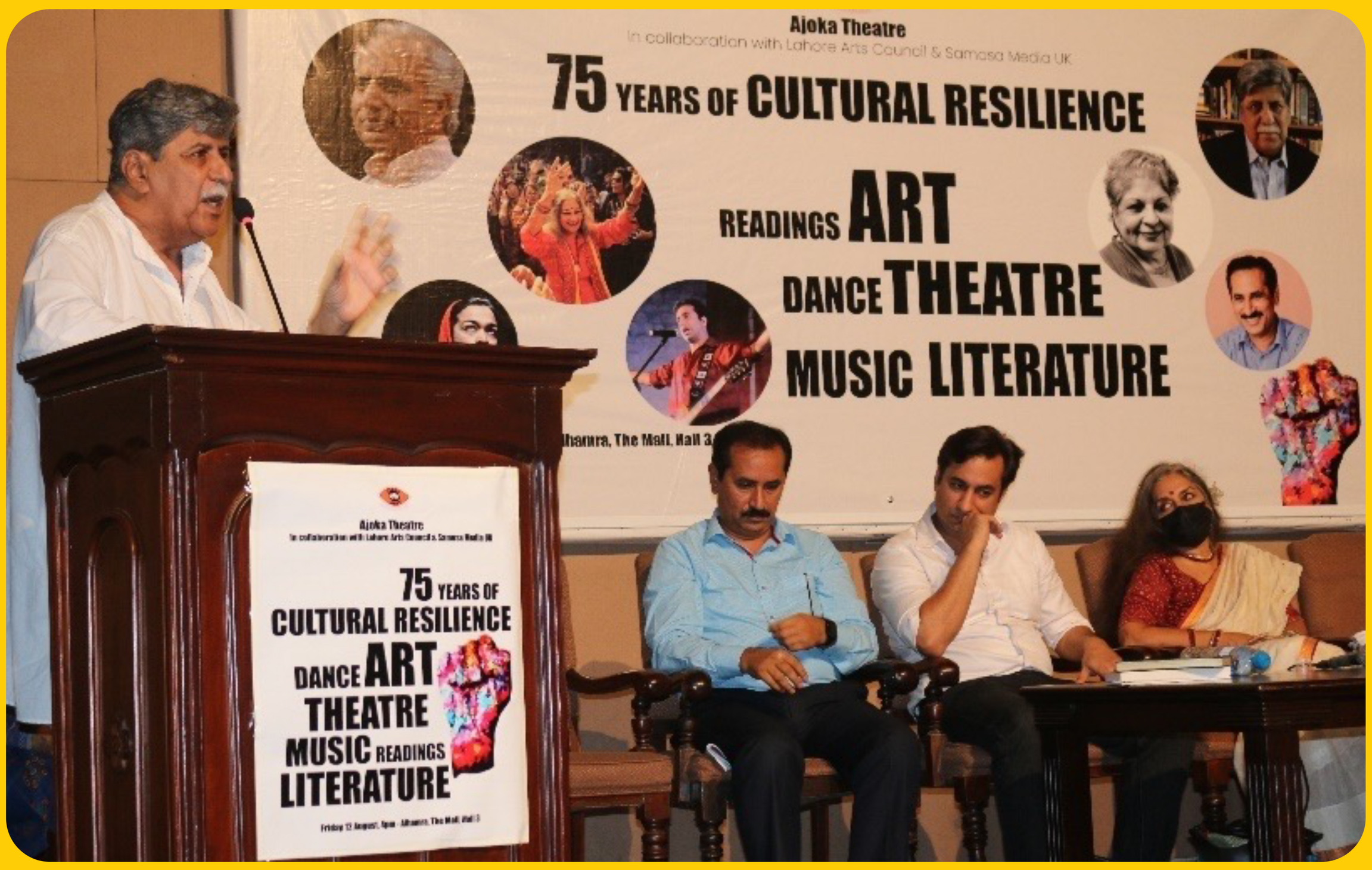
Ajoka attaches great importance to developing contacts with theatre groups in other countries, particularly in Asia. It has long-standing relations with theatre groups in India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri-Lanka, the Philippines and has worked on joint productions with several groups of these countries and the International Drama and Education Association (IDEA).

Within Pakistan Ajoka has worked with NGOs such as the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, the Family Planning Association of Pakistan, the WWF, the Goethe Institute, the Heinrich-Boll Foundation, the War Against Rape and the Alhamra Arts Council. It has a special relationship with the women's movement and a large number of Ajoka plays have addressed the gender issue. Ajoka also has close relations with the US-based Theatre without Borders.

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75 years of Cultural Resilience



Pakistan's distinguished scholars joined eminent artists to celebrate cultural resistance and resilience at a special event held at Alhamra on Friday 12 August. Organised by Ajoka Theatre, in collaboration with the Lahore Arts Council and Samosa Media UK, the event included scholarly presentations on the resilience of writers, poets, musicians, dancers, theatre activists and visual artists as well spectacular performances by dance guru Sheema Kermani and the radical Laal Band.

Ajoka Executive Director Shahid Nadeem, and Ajoka Chair spoke about the purpose of the event and said that Pakistani artists have shown remarkable resilience in the face of challenges such as military rule and religious extremism.

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75 years of Cultural Resilience



75th anniversary of Independence provides an occasion to pay tribute to the heroes of cultural resistance and celebrate their achievements. Anwar Akhtar of Samosa Media UK, talked about keen interest among British Pakistanis in the 75th anniversary of independence and 1947 Partition. He said South Asian culture is now significant part of British society, reflected by recently concluded Commonwealth Games ceremony revolving around Bhangra performances.

Mariya Afzal of British Council spoke about Council's plans for the 75th anniversary and congratulated Ajoka for organising such a meaningful event. After introductory remarks, a video compilation "Ushaq Ke Qaflay" was screened which paid tribute to artists and writers who continued freely creating despite imprisonment and bans. They included Faiz, Faraz, Jalib, Daman, Sadeqain, AjmalKhattak, Shaikh Ayaz, Gul Khan Naseer, Fehmida Riaz ,Yousaf Lodhi, Kishwar Naheed, Sheema Kermani and Madeeha Gauhar.

In the next session, scholars made presentations. Asghar Nadeem Syed and Nasir Abbas Nayyar discussed resistance and socio-political criticism in Urdu literature. Academic-musician Taimur Rahman spoke about the role politically

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aware musicians have played in struggle f or freedom and social justice. Dancer and social activist Sheema Kermani shared her experiences as a dancer and dance teacher in carrying on with her work in defiance of pressures from authoritarian rulers and extremists. She also recited revolutionary Latin American Pablo Neruda’s poem about resistance to oppressive forces.

Playwright Shahid Nadeem, in his presentation on theatre of resistance, said though theatre suffered an irreparable loss at the time of Partition, groups like Ajoka and Tehrik e Niswan picked up the pieces and developed a potent theatre for social change movement. He said though Ajoka is now permitted to perform at arts councils, challenges of censorship and thought control have not gone away. The last presentation of the session was by visual artist and former Principal of National College of Arts, Naazish Ata-Ullah, who discussed the political and social critique by Pakistani artists, showing their work on slides.

The last session of the evening consisted of performances. Noted Punjabi Poet Afzal Sahir and poet-activist Khalid Javed Jan of “Main BaghiHoon” recited inspiring poems, followed by songs from Ajoka plays. A very well- performed dramatic reading of the English translation of Shahid Nadeem’s play “River of Sorrow” was the next item of the programme. The play was translated by Amena Chima and recently published by Sahitya Academy in an anthology titled “Plays from a Fractured Land. Editor of the anthology Playwright Atamjit Singh spoke from US and praised the play as a major contribution to Punjabi drama, Popular TV and theatre actor Samiya Mumtaz read the lead role and was ably assisted by Fizza Jamal, Yusra Irfan, Naseem Abbas. Qaiser Khan, Sameer Afzal, Qurrat Taj, Fizza Tirmizi, Faizan Sukhera, Saira Salman and RizwanRiaz. The highlight of the session was a spectacular

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performance by Sheema Kermani, based on a Fehmida Riaz poem. The event ended at a high note with an energizing performance by Laal Band, led by Taimur Rahman.

Ajoka Director at the end, thanked the artists and scholars for their valuable participation and Lahore Arts Council, Punjab Council of Arts and British Council for their support. The event was attended by a large number of young people and artists from various disciplines.

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25th Alhamra Theatre Festival



Ajoka Performed two back to back plays on the concluding day of 25th Alhamra Theatre Festival!

Suicide Point is a hilarious play full of songs, dance and dark humour written by Ajoka Institute’s Art of Writing student Ummer Amin and performed by Art of Acting students. The play was directed by Nirvaan Nadeem.

Toba Tek Singh, Ajoka acclaimed play, an adaptation by Shahid Nadeem of Manto’s masterpiece shortstory about events of 1947 and directed by Madeeha Gauhar. The plays were well-appreciated by the audience with standing ovation.

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25th Alhamra Theatre Festival





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Little superstars



Students ranging from 4 years to 10 years showcased their talent at PILAC, Lahore. Art of Acting, kids edition of Ajoka Institute presented their work developed during the acting courses. Art of Acting-Kids Edition students presented extracts from Ajoka plays for children, “The Last Tree" and “Band Gali Kay Bacchay”.

The performances were mentored by Institute Director Nirvaan Nadeem and trainers Yusra Irfan and Nida Malik. The children performed their plays with confidence and fun. The audience enjoyed and appreciated their entertaining performances followed by dramatic readings of four original scripts developed by Art of Writing students.

The new writers included Sania Umair, Sameen Rafaqat, Obien Mayo, Sania Dar, Umair Islmail, Muhsin Ali assisted by Ajoka acting and writing students including Fahad Amir, Hassan Zaidi and Fizza Tirmizi.

At the end, Ms. Sughra Sadaf DG PILAC distributed certificates to all students.

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Ajoka in the news

Daily Times Monday, June 20, 2022 B3

REVIEWS

dailytimes.com.pk /DailyTimesPak

LAHORE

Ajoka students present 'Suicide Point' — play full of life

■ The cast, all first time actors, included Rai Kamran Ali, Sanaiya Aftab, Ibtihaj Ahmed, M Asif Ali, Hammad Yousaf, Muzamil Khokhar, M Abbas Salotra, Hassan Atif, Ahmad Shaykh, Zainul Abideen, Rai Aon, Zahra Imran and Shehrooz



Staff Report

Ajoka's art of acting students put up a polished and meaningful performance before a packed audience at PILAC, Lahore.

"Suicide Point", written by Ajoka's Art of Writing student Ummer Amin, and directed by Ajoka Institute director Nirvaan Nadeem, the play presents a business outlet offering ©convenient and affordable suicide". The witty and fast-moving script revolves around the manager of Suicide Point who deals with clients such as a student who has failed in exam, a jilted liver, a businessman who is burdened with loans and a property tycoon who has bought a ticket to Paradise.

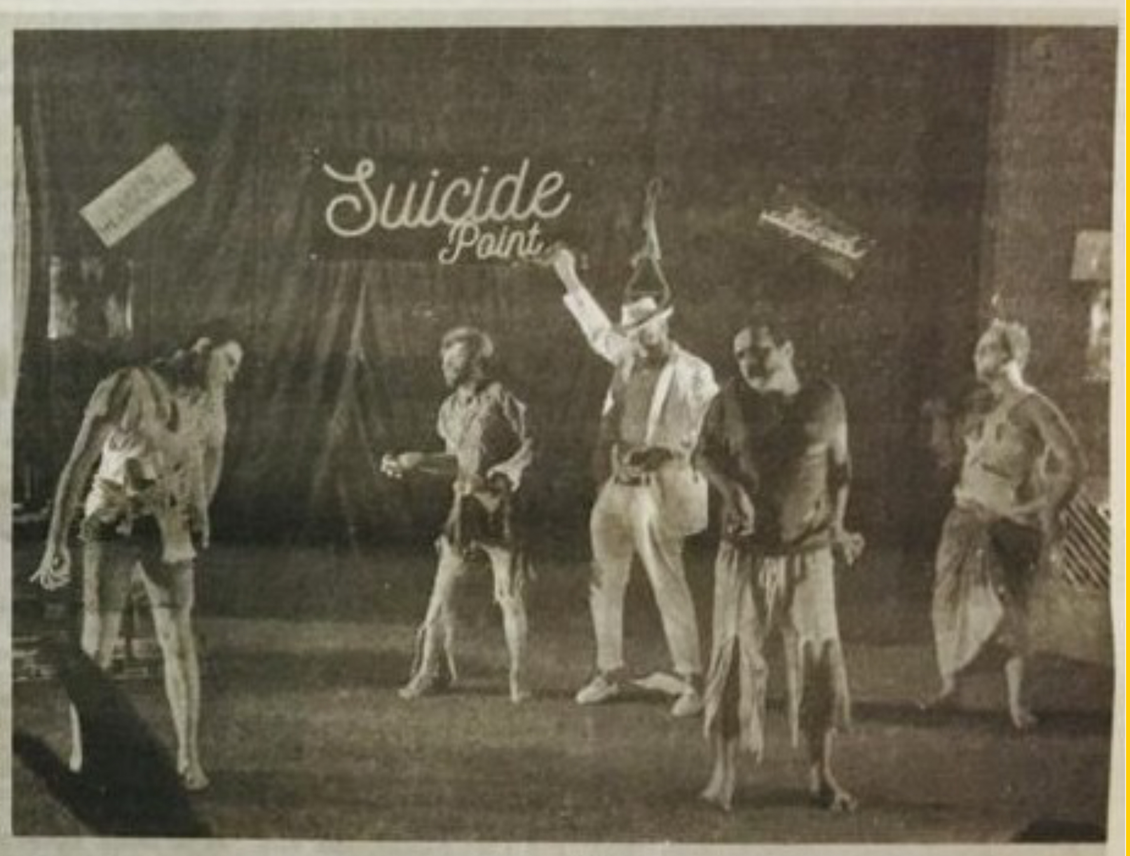
The cast, all first time actors, included Rai Kamran Ali, Sanaiya Aftab, Ibtihaj Ahmed, M Asif Ali, Hammad Yousaf, Muzamil Khokhar, M. Abbas Salotra, Hassan Atif, Ahmad Shaykh, Zainul Abideen, Rai Aon, Zahra Imran and Shehrooz.

Playwright Shahid Nadeem who conducts Art of Writing classes, appreciated the powerful satirical references in the script, which reflected the desperate economic challenges leading to a suicide wish among the victims.

The play was preceded by a short performance by the children of the Kids edition of Ajoka's art of acting course. The performers included Tanya Umair, Taimoor Bin Saud, M Bin Usman, Ayat Bareen Khan and Abdul Rehman Khan.

Ajoka Institute director Nirvaan Nadeem congratulated the impressive performances of the acting students and distributed certificates to the performers.

He also thanked PILAC for its support.



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Ajoka in the news

THE NEWS
day
31, 2022

CITY NEWS

Lahore

Ajoka steals the show as Alhamra Festival ends



Our correspondent
LAHORE

THE 25th Alhamra Theatre Festival concluded on Friday night with a spellbinding double-bill performed by Pakistan's leading theatre group, Ajoka.

The group presented two plays before a jam-packed enthusiastic audience followed by sustained thunderous applause. The first play was a remarkable first work by Ajoka's Art of Writing student Ummer Amin, performed by Art of Acting students. "Suicide Point" was a scathing yet entertaining satire on the hopeless conditions of life where even death has become a costly option.

The play revolved around a company "Suicide Point" which offers people fed of living, an "attractive" package to end their lives. The play was ably directed by Ajoka Institute director Nirvaan Nadeem. The cast included Rai Kamran, Mian Meesam, Nyle Imtiaz, Haifa Ambreen, Shehroz, Zain ul Abideen, Muzamil Khokhar, Ibtihaj Ahmad, Hammad Yousaf, Ahmed Shaykh, Abbas Salotra, Hassan Atif, Asif Ali Khan and Sohail Afgan.

The second play was an adaptation of Manto's world acclaimed short story "Toba Tek Singh" based on the events of 1947 Partition when the governments of India and Pakistan decided on an exchange of lunatics on communal grounds. The central character is a Sikh resident of Punjab district Stovall Tek Singh and is worried about the fate of his birth town as a result of the partition of Punjab.

Creatively adapted by playwright Shahid Nadeem and originally directed by late Madeeha Gauhar, it was an artistically brilliant and emotionally engaging production. The cast included M. Qaiser khan as Toba Tek Singh, Usman Zia, Fahad Hashmi, Rizwan Riaz, Shahzad Sadiq, Bilal Mughal, Luke Kelvin, Fahad Hashmi Asad Bhatti, Nasir Mehmood, Hammad Youdaf, Hassan and Mian Meesam.

Ajoka Director Nirvaan Nadeem appreciated the Ajoka team for their passion and talent and congratulated the Lahore Arts Council (LAC) for holding a very successful festival. He hoped that the LAC would continue to support quality meaningful theatre. LAC Executive Director Ms Farhat Jabeen distributed the certificates to participating groups.

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Thank You!

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