

Ram Gopal Bajaj to be conferred META Lifetime Achievement Award 2024

- META 2024 jury includes Dolly Thakore, Kulbhushan Kharbanda, Kusum Haider, Mahesh Dattani, Raghuvir Yadav, Smriti Rajgarhiya and Vinay Pathak
- Nominated plays to be showcased at the META Festival in Delhi from 14th - 20th March, 2024

The Mahindra Excellence in Theatre Awards (META) and Festival 2024 announced today that the META 2024 Lifetime Achievement Award will be conferred on celebrated Indian stage, film and television actor/director Ram Gopal Bajaj who will be felicitated during the award ceremony on 20th March 2024 at Kamani Auditorium. Teamwork Arts and Mahindra Group hosted a press conference at the Taj Mahal Hotel, New Delhi, introducing the jury members, namely Indian theatre actress, casting director and writer Dolly Thakore; prolific and celebrated Indian actor Kulbhushan Kharbanda; veteran theatre director and actress Kusum Haider; eminent director, actor, acclaimed playwright and writer Mahesh Dattani; celebrated Indian actor, music composer, singer and set designer Raghuvir Yadav; director of the Serendipity Arts Foundation and Serendipity Arts Festival Smriti Rajgarhiya; celebrated theatre and film actor Vinay Pathak.

Jay Shah, Head, Cultural Outreach, Mahindra & Mahindra Ltd, said, "As we prepare for the 19th iteration of META, anticipation builds for what promises to be yet another momentous occasion in the realm of Indian Theatre. Our commitment to nurturing theatre, the bedrock of numerous artistic expressions, has yielded remarkable results, with each passing year showcasing an unparalleled display of theatrical excellence. META serves as a vibrant reflection of our nation's cultural mosaic, celebrating the richness of language, diversity of themes, and breadth of genres. As we approach the final years of its adolescence, META stands as a beacon of artistic ingenuity,

embodying the very essence of our nation's creative spirit. We eagerly await the festival with a sense of eager anticipation and pride."

Sanjoy K. Roy, Managing Director, Teamwork Arts & Festival Producer, said, *"The META jury for 2024, represent the best of the arts and include actor, writer, host - Dolly Thakore, Film and Theatre actor and psychiatrist - Dr. Kulbushan Kharbanda, Actor- Kusum Haider, Writer, Director -Mahesh Dattani, Film and theatre actor - Raghuvir Yadav, Serendipity Festival Director and Managing Trustee - Smriti Rajgarhiya, and actor - Vinay Pathak. They will come together for a week to view the 10 best nominated plays and award this year's winners on 20th march."*

The announcements came ahead of the week-long Mahindra Excellence in Theatre Awards (META) and Festival to be held from **March 14th to 20th, 2024** at New Delhi's **Kamani Auditorium** and **Shri Ram Centre**, where META 2024's ten shortlisted plays will be performed for an esteemed panel of jury members, as well as theatre-lovers in the capital.

As always, this year too, the Festival will focus on key narratives - such as a powerful retelling of epic tales, oppression and authoritarianism, protest and rebellion, identity and gender, the sanctity of the artist, ethics, morality, adventure and grit - with its diverse repertoire of plays from across the country. Like each year, the META secretariat received over 390 entries representing languages like Assamese, Bangla, English, Hindi, Hindustani, Malayalam and Marathi.

Sharing his thoughts on theatre industry, **Raghuvir Yadav** said, *"The heart of theatre will always beat. Trends may change, screens may multiply, but the thrill of a live performance is irreplaceable."*

"I am very thrilled to be on the jury for META this year. META is one of my most favorite theater festivals. Here, one feels there is an immense showcase of talent across a variety of languages" , said **Dolly Thakore**.

Sharing his delight **Vinay Pathak** said, *"I am extremely delighted to be a part of the 19th META awards. Here's another opportunity to watch some of the best theatre productions of our country, and enjoy theatre at its best. META has been a pioneer at discovering some of the best theatre talents of india, and I impatiently look forward to witness the selection this year. My best wishes & congratulations to all the 10 plays that have made the cut. Now let's celebrate it. Cheers!"*

Talking about his participation **Mahesh Dattani** said, *"It is always a pleasure to be on the jury at META. I get to see some of the country's finest theatre back to back. The discussions with other jurors are sometimes a masterclass in theatre critiquing. I have come closer to being a faithful Rasik with every experience I have as a META juror."*

Ram Gopal Bajaj, this year's recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award, is a distinguished figure in Indian theatre. Renowned as a theatre director, Hindi film actor, and former director of the National School of Drama, Bajaj's illustrious career has earned him accolades including the Padma Shri in 1996 and the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 2003 for his significant contributions to the theatrical arts.

In previous years, the META Lifetime Achievement Award has been conferred on several stalwarts of Indian theatre, including Late Badal Sircar (2010), Late Zohra Sehgal (2011), Late Khaled Chaudhury (2012), Late E. Alkazie (2013), Late Girish Karnad (2014), Late Heisnam Kanhai

Lal (2015), Ratan Thiyam (2016), Late Arun Kakde (2017), Vijaya Mehta (2018), Mahesh Elkunchwar (2019), Barry John (2020), Sushma Seth (2023).

For the full list and details of nominations, please visit www.metawards.com. Audiences can book their tickets for the Festival [here](#). The full schedule of the 19ath META Festival is as follows.

FESTIVAL SCHEDULE:

14th March 2024

Gagan Damama Bajyo

Directed by Piyush Mishra & Hemant Pandey

Language: Hindi, Duration: 1 hours 40 mins, Venue: Kamani Auditorium, Time: 8:00 PM

15th March 2024

Raghunath

Directed by Bidyut Kr. Nath

Language: Assamese, Duration: 1 hours 10 mins, Venue: Shri Ram Centre, Time: 6:00 PM

AgniSuta Draupadi

Directed by Maisnam Joy Metei

Language: Hindi, Time: 1 hours 30 mins, Venue: Kamani Auditorium, Time: 8:00 PM

16th March 2024

Bhoothangal

Directed by O.T Shajahan

Language: Malayalam, Duration: 1 hours 20 mins, Venue: Shri Ram Centre, Time 6:00 PM

Siachen

Directed by Makrand Deshpande

Language: Hindi, Duration: 1 hours 20 mins, Venue: Kamani auditorium, Time: 8:00 PM

17th March 2024

Gopal Ure & Co.

Directed by Sujan Mukhopadhyay

Language: Bengali, Duration: 1 hours 50 mins, Venue: Shri Ram Centre, Time: 6:00 PM

Avalanche

Directed by Gandharv Dewan

Language: Hindustani, Duration: 1 hours 40 mins, Venue: Kamani Auditorium, Time: 8:00 PM

18th March 2024

Ghanta Ghanta Ghanta Ghanta Ghanta

Directed by Mohit Takalkar

Language: Marathi, Time: 1 hours 40 mins, Venue: Shri Ram Centre, Time: 6:00 PM

Do You Know This Song?

Directed by Mallika Taneja

Language: Hindi & English, Duration: 1 hours 30 mins, Venue: Kamani Auditorium, Time: 8:00 PM

19th March 2024

Hayavadana

Directed by Neelam Man Singh Chowdhry

Language: Hindi, Duration: 1 hours 30 mins, Venue: Shri Ram Centre auditorium, Time: 8:00 PM

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NOTES TO EDITORS

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Founded in 1945, the Mahindra Group is one of the largest and most admired multinational federation of companies with 2, 60,000 employees in over 100 countries. It enjoys a leadership position in farm equipment, utility vehicles, information technology and financial services in India and is the world's largest tractor company by volume. It has a strong presence in renewable energy, agriculture, logistics, hospitality and real estate.

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About Teamwork Arts:

Teamwork Arts is a highly versatile production company with roots in the performing arts, social action and the corporate world. For over 30 years, Teamwork Arts has taken India to the world and brought the world to India, presenting the finest of Indian performers, writers, change makers and visual artistes in the knowledge and arts space in India and abroad. Every year, we produce over 33 festivals in 72 cities and 26 countries in the fields of performing & visual arts and literature. We produce the world's largest literary gathering: the annual Jaipur Literature Festival; JLF international now travels to the US, UK, Canada, Australia, the Maldives, and Europe.

Even amidst the upheaval and unsettling times of 2020 and through 2021, Teamwork Arts successfully launched the digital series, JLF Brave New World and Words Are Bridges, which were viewed by over 4.8 million people in their first season. Through its digital avatar, the Jaipur Literature Festival reached over 27 million viewers in January 2021. Art Matters empowers artistes across India to collaborate by commissioning them to create new works. The digital series

Be Inspired was launched in 2021 – a series that crystal gazes into the future with conversations on science, technology, innovation, environment and more. Two on-ground editions of ‘Be Inspired - Festival of Ideas’ were held in 2023 and the first edition of Sikkim Arts & Literature Festival was launched in May 2023.

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