



Press Release New Initiative Unites Festivals Across Europe

Melas are colourful and welcoming family-friendly celebrations of south Asian culture. Over 50 take place in the UK alone, annually drawing crowds in excess of 1 million people, from a wide variety of community and cultural backgrounds. They currently run throughout the summer from May, continuing into November.

Melas have been establishing their place within the UK cultural landscape for almost 20 years. In fact, wherever south Asians have settled around the world, melas have become increasingly prominent within the cultural calendar. One of the biggest in Europe is held in Norway and there are several large events that take place in USA, Canada and Australia.

The word Mela derives from the Sanskrit word for 'gathering'. In the Asian sub-continent, melas are traditionally held as community events, which can involve dance, music, fashion, food and sometimes film. They can also be trade fairs and large religious gatherings. In the West, melas have evolved to become celebratory arts and cultural events, incorporating performance and art elements, with professional performers of international status as well as strong community involvement, commercial, sporting and culinary aspects. Melas provide an invaluable opportunity for people of south Asian origin to learn more about their own rich heritage of arts and culture, while encouraging interaction with other ethnic minority groups and the mainstream population. Melas also provide a boost for local businesses particularly hotels, restaurants and retail.

European Mela Network is an initiative, organised by melas and supported by the Arts Council England, set up to unite and support melas across Europe. Members include the largest melas like **Bradford, London** and **Oslo** as well as smaller organisations which are run on a voluntary basis. The website includes news, up to date information, links to European melas and a members' forum.

"The European Mela Network is a wonderful opportunity for England's melas to network nationally and internationally, sharing expertise and growing the sector. Melas celebrate the rich diversity of our culture and have the ability to unite communities in a common artistic experience." Charles Rowley, Arts Council England NW

EMN Chair and spokesperson is actor and award winning director **Ajay Chhabra**. As an actor, he created the role of Anil in BBC children's programme *The Basil Brush Show*, and has many film, TV, stage and radio credits. As a director his award winning productions *Hamari Kahani* and *Inner City Lives* were both pioneering projects. His multi-disciplinary work can be seen in film, festivals, on streets, stage, television and radio. He is co-founder and artistic director of **London Mela**.

"EMN is a very exciting initiative, which will connect people in melas across the UK and Europe for support, programming and discussion. Melas are a celebration of south Asian culture and a powerful tool for promoting intercultural collaboration and understanding. Mela is a metaphor for public celebration of diasporic communities" Ajay Chhabra

For more press information, to organise interviews, photos etc please call Morag Neil on 0131 557 5918 or 0771 288 0965 or email moragneil@blueyonder.co.uk

More information and downloadable media resources - www.melanet.eu

Appendix 1 - Mela Calendar 2007

Dates of confirmed 2007 Melas. Please check with www.melanet.eu for updates

April

29 Wolverhamton

May

13 Brick Lane

June

9/10 Leeds

17 Glasgow

22/24 Amsterdam

23/24 Rochdale

23 Rossendale

30 Southampton

July

1 Preston

6/8 Utrecht

7/8 Bradford

7/8 Blackburn

15 Croydon

15 Kirklees

15 Leicester Belgrave

15 Middlesbrough

15 Nottingham

15 Tunbridge Wells

20/22 Almera, Holland

21 Hull

22 Bristol

22 Oldham

28/29 Crawley

28/29 Manchester

28 Swindon

29 Birmingham Eid

29 Hyndburn

August

3/5 Amsterdam, Holland

5 Luton

5 Slough

5 Stockport

10/12 Almera, Holland

12 London

17/19 Oslo, Norway

19 East London

26/27 Newcastle

26 Belfast

26 Dun Laoghaire

26 High Wycombe

September

1/2 Edinburgh

8/9 Rotherham

9 Maidstone

October

21 Dusshera/Diwali Manchester

This list will be updated on a regular basis. Bookmark www.melanet.eu to keep up to date

Appendix 2

European Mela Network - Funding & Executive Personnel

In development for a number of years, the European Mela Network has grown from a desire by mela organisers to have a body that represents mela interests and promotes understanding of what melas do.

It was formally established in December 2003. Funding has been provided by the **Arts Council of England** to help establish the organisation over the next two years.

EMN is an independently constituted organisation, overseen by an Executive Committee, representing various 'regions'. They are:

- **Ajay Chhabra** - Chair, Artistic Director of London Mela, Director - nutkhut
- **Aud Digernes** - Organiser of Oslo Mela
- **Champak Kumar Limbachia** - Artistic Director of Oriental Arts (Bradford)
- **Nash Rehman** - Vaisakhi Mela, London
- **Khalid Salimi** - Director of Oslo Mela
- **Mohammed Sarwar** - Director of Rochdale Mela
- **Nisha Tandon** - Organiser of Belfast Mela
- **David Thomas** - Curator/Programmer, The New Art Exchange
- **Sheena Wrigley** - Head of Theatres, Arts & Festivals, Bradford MDC

Appendix 3

EMN joins cultural leadership programme

European Mela Network has been successful in achieving funding under the Cultural Leadership Programme. EMN's application will allow 6 leaders from within the Black and Ethnic Minority communities that are active in the Mela Network to undergo career development.