

# Delhi fest celebrates 18th-century Urdu poet Meer Taqi Meer

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A FOUR-DAY festival honouring the work of Meer Taqi Meer, a renowned 18th-century Urdu poet, kicked off at the India International Centre (IIC) in Delhi on Thursday.

The festival titled 'Meer Ici Dilli, Shahjahanabad: The Evolving City' — hosting book launches, seminars, and cultural events — is organised by Anjuman Taraqqi Urdu (Hind), one of the oldest Urdu literary institutions in India. Entry to the festival is free for all.

Delivering the keynote address on Thursday, Saif Mahmood,

director of the organisation's United Kingdom branch, told *The Indian Express*, "Meer was prominent in shaping the language. The festival will explore the history, anthropology, culture, waterways, and food of Shahjahanabad. Urdu, which is also called Rekhta, means mixture. It used to be the language of the common people and is inherently secular as it accepts words from other languages. The language has gone through considerable changes, and the festival will explore all the phases of the transformation of Urdu."

Alongside conversations with poet and lyricist Javed Akhtar, and actor-director Naseeruddin Shah, on Thursday and Saturday, respectively, the finale on Sunday will



Javed Akhtar and Saif Mahmood during the event at India International Centre in Delhi on Thursday. Suanshu Khurana

feature Dastan-i-Mir — a dastangoi presentation by Mahmood Farooqui and Darain Shahidi.

Historian Ali Nadeem Rezavi is scheduled to speak at the festival at 10:30 am on Friday on the tran-

sition from Dehli-i-Kunha, the first and the oldest city built by Qutub-din Aibak, the founder of the Delhi Sultanate, to Shahjahanabad, the seventh city built in 1648 by Shah Jahan.

"Earlier, Delhi was called the city of the dead as it was full of tombs. There is no archaeological evidence about the city between the Vedic period and the 10th century AD. Our session will explore the city's transition from the Mahabharata period to when it was called Shahjahanabad. We will explore the emergence of the Persian language," said Rezavi.

At 4 pm on Saturday, critic Shafey Kidwai would hold talks on books showcasing the "ethnography of Shahjahanabad" like Mirza Sangeen Baig's *Sairul Manazil* (1821), Sirsyed Ahmad Khan's *Asarus Sandeed* (1847, revised in 1854), and Baseehuruddin's *Waqeate Darul Hukumat Delhi* (1909). "These books showcase the

social and cultural geography of Delhi through the prism of monuments and buildings," he said, adding that Baig's work was "one of the first which described Delhi's oldest buildings, monuments, bazaars, kings, and musicians".

Historian Swapna Liddle, scheduled to speak at two sessions — at 2:30 pm on Friday, and at 12 pm on Sunday — is set to make the attendees explore Shahjahanabad through photographs and images. "I will use historical maps from the mid-19th century to show you all sorts of lanes and gullies, and how they looked back then. I will also discuss the people who lived there, with some of the streets named on them," she told *The Indian Express*.