

Game players

Officially Bangladesh's largest ever sports event, the South Asian Games demanded impressive opening and closing ceremonies, with sound to match. **Richard Lawn** reports

DHAKA WAS RECENTLY HOME TO this year's South Asian Games, marking the third visit the event has made to the Bangladesh capital – and the largest sporting event ever to have been staged in the country. As well as the host nation, the 1,800 participating athletes came from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, Nepal, the Maldives and Afghanistan to compete in 23 events spread over 12 days. Before their arrival, however, but with the requirements for the opening and closing ceremonies looming large, audio and lighting expertise was sought from overseas, and the event organisers turned to the talents of the Singapore-based Showtec Group.

Despite a population in excess of seven million and the growing popularity of music groups and rock bands in Bangladesh, traditional folk music remains the most popular form of live music, with the result that the live production and rental businesses are not as prolific as in other Asian countries. Having created a strong reputation by providing the PA, lighting and staging for the Asian Indoor Games and a number of major sporting events, it was to Showtec that the games' organisers turned for the opening and closing events – which they managed with great credit. Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina declared the Games open after a colourful three-and-a-half hour inaugural ceremony at the Bangabandhu National Stadium (BNS), and could have awarded Showtec a gold medal in its own category.

As athletes practice until they are at the peak of their abilities, the crew of 12 from Showtec also did just that, beginning their preparations as early as November 2009. 'We sat down and studied the problems that we would be confronted with beforehand and ensured that we



South Asian Games rehearsals at Dhaka's Bangabandhu National Stadium



One of the 20 stacks serving the stadium's crowd

would be equipped and prepared to overcome these once we hit Dhaka,' explains technical director and project manager SD Christopher, who works for Krafttec Sdn Bhd, Showtec's sister company based in Kuala Lumpur.

Although Bangla is the official language of Bangladesh, English is widely spoken in business circles and spared the Showtec team problems with communication and translation. But being broadcast to more than a billion people, the

Showtec crew

Technical director/project manager: SD Christopher

Audio engineer manager: Chandra Mohan

Audio system engineers: Subhash S/O Letchumanan Pillay, Mohamad Ermie Bin Ahmad, Ivan Lee

Audio engineer FOH/foldback: Mohamad Hasbillah

Lighting system manager: Leow Zhen Hong

Lighting programmer: Bernard Lee Wei Ming

Systems power engineer: Jordan Lee Chien Yin

Lighting engineers: Toh Kok Yong, Swee Jian Fei, Ahmad Hafriz Bin Berkath

opening ceremony was unlikely to run without a hitch, and so redundancy was a prerequisite of the set-up. At front of house, Showtec used a trustworthy Yamaha M7CL digital console, but also pulled in a Yamaha DSP-5D expander with a laptop in the event that the very worst happened – it didn't. A recently acquired Stagetec Nexus fibre-optic audio

network with a ring topology was also shipped over for the ceremonies. Twin sets of ARX MSX32 passive splitters, Tascam UB 2400 digital audio workstations, Apogee Digital Big Ben word clocks, Tascam HD-R1 compact flash players (whose instant replay triggered the audio tracks) and five Hortita TR 100 time-code readers (used for production cues) were also on the technical rider. 'We pre-recorded the National Anthems for playback from the Tascam HD-R1 player,' says Mr Christopher. 'The whole show was programmed and mixed beforehand in sequence. The Apogee clock worked perfectly and everything synchronised to this.'

Showtec had experienced problems getting their equipment through customs in Hanoi in November 2009 for the Asian Indoor Games, despite the fact that it had arrived by sea three weeks in advance of the show. As for Hanoi, the shipment to Dhaka was sent on 5 January, three weeks in advance of the South Asian Games. Mercifully, there was to be no repeat of the anxiety in Vietnam, two months earlier. 'We sent all the documentation in early and hoped for the best. After all, we'd never staged an event in Bangladesh before, so we didn't know quite what to expect,' says Mr Christopher. Happily, Showtec had the Bangladesh military as its ally. 'The army were fantastic, and there was only a slight delay in the shipment coming through. Not only that, but they provided local logistics and helped us with whatever we needed.'

The Bangabandhu National Stadium has a capacity of 40,000 spectators, but for this huge broadcast event it was lowered to just 15,000, with the emphasis placed on staged choreography in some of the stands and expansive VIP seating in others. This affected the way in which the BNS would require its sound

EQUIPMENT LIST

Mixing consoles

Yamaha M7CL
Yamaha DSP-5D with laptop (redundancy)

Loudspeakers

Adamson Y10 line array elements (24)
Adamson Y10 subwoofers (12)
Logic System M115 monitors (12)
Logic Systems Ethos LA line array (audience/infield section) (22)
Logic Systems Ethos VA line array (VIP) (24)
Logic Systems Ethos ND315 (VIP/audience/infield sections) (14)
Logic Systems Ethos ND218 subwoofers (VIP/audience/infield sections) (20)
Logic Systems DP2140 processors (VIP/audience/infield sections) (20)
Nexo PS10 monitors (8)

Amplification

Camco D4 amplifiers (6)
Lab.gruppen fP6400 (16)

Wireless Microphone systems

Shure E6i Headset microphones (4)
Shure UR4D receivers and UR-1 beltpacks and Beta 58 capsules (8)
Sennheiser SR350 IEM transmitters (2)
Sennheiser EK300 IEM beltpacks (8)
Sennheiser AP5000 IEM transmitters
Shure UA 845WB antenna combiner (2)
Shure WL50 lapel mics (4)

Other Equipment

Tascam HD-R1 compact flash player – instant replay to trigger audio tracks (2)
Hortita TR 100 time code reader – time code visual for production cues (10)
Stage Tec Nexus fibre optic audio network (4)
ARX MSX 32 passive splitter for all lines (2)
Tascam UB 2400 digital audio workstation (2)
Apogee Big Ben word clock (2)



The impressive lighting towers



reinforcement to be set up. In total, 16 PA clusters were ground stacked around the perimeter facing towards the audience seating areas, and a further four were directed inwards towards the field as monitors for the athletes and performers. The general audience areas were served by six stacks, which each used five Adamson Y10 speakers and two Y10 subwoofers, on account of their wide dispersion characteristics. Lab.gruppen FP6400 amplifiers powered these individual stacks, while XTA DP226 processors handled loudspeaker management. Sixteen stacks covered the VIP and fill areas, each composed of two Logic Systems Ethos LA (long

throw) and single VA (medium throw) line array elements. These were supplemented by single units of dual-18 inch ND218 and triple 15-inch ND315 subwoofers to significantly enhance the lower frequencies. A combination of Lab.gruppen FP6400 and Camco Q10 amplifiers powered these stacks, while processing was handled by Logic Systems DP2410 units. A further four stacks were used for the VIP seats, and these use single Ethos VA, ND218 and ND315 cabinets. In addition, there were 10 Logic System MI15 full-range cabinets and, finally, a number of Nexo PS10 monitors used as wedge monitors.



A Logic Systems PA stack



Sennheiser EK300 IEM beltpack

Prior to arrival, Showtec asked for 75mm thick audio platforms to be constructed to support the equipment on the playing field, as well as amplifier housings to shelter the electrical units from the rain and humidity. In the event, temperatures rarely passed the 20°C mark and so this wasn't an issue, although the crew remarked how chilly the evenings were. Another pre-requisite listed by Showtec, however, nearly backfired as Mr Christopher explains: 'We submitted plans and a design for a lighting structure to be built,

but ultimately the on-site technicians couldn't provide portioning and there was no colour toner on site. Three days before set-up, we decided that we had to take action, as they were using outdated angle bars. We got back to basics as we were running out of time, and cut down on one of the toners. The tower that we used was a lot simpler in the end, needing



Colourful rehearsals in full swing

less welding, but it was fine.'

A combination of Sennheiser SR350 and AP5000 transmitters and EK300 beltpacks were used as in-ear monitors, together with Shure WL50 lapels and E6i headset microphones. 'We normally use Shure UHF-R wireless with Shure SM58 hand-holds on account of their ruggedness and reliability,' says Mr Christopher. Showtec also used Audio-Technica AT1857 gooseneck microphones on some of the podiums for speeches.

As a result of rising industrial and consumer demands, Dhaka is prone

to unexpected power blackouts. Showtec could take no chances in terms of receiving a constant supply of electricity and arranged a 400A generator for the audio and lighting and an 800A generator for pyrotechnics, projection, lasers and water displays. 'We needed local grid power, but there were blackouts during the rehearsals, so the generators saved us,' reveals Mr Christopher.

Despite traffic congestion that meant the journey from the hotel to the stadium could vary between one-and-a-half and three hours, the Showtec team enjoyed their stay in Dhaka. 'The locals and the army were very supportive, kind and hard working,' Mr Christopher offers. 'We couldn't have asked for more. It was also a great feeling to see the audience faces light up with excitement during the opening ceremony as they have rarely, if ever, been subjected to such a spectacle of sound and light.' India fulfilled its expectation as favourite to sweep the medal honours at the 11th South Asian Games following the fanfare on Friday 29 January, but recognition should also be given to Showtec for significantly enhancing the opening and closing ceremonies.

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The PA stacks set up on the running track perimeter catering to the fills