

# A 'Pamiri Evening' At Aga Khan Academy Mombasa

Tajik students at the Aga Khan Academy Mombasa transported their audience to the "Roof of the World" - as their native region of Pamir Mountains is famously known - through their rich, cultural performances on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2017, writes **HAIFA BADI-UZ-ZAMAN**.

The event showcased Tajik culture while focusing on the theme of "Novruz", which refers to the Persian New Year that marks the spring equinox and is one of the major festivals celebrated in Tajikistan.

It is also observed across Iran, several Central Asian countries, and the Caucasus.

The Tajik students at the Academy, along with their mentor, teacher, and event organizer Ms. Rukhshona Sinavbarova, recreated the feel of Novruz through the traditional music

featured in the event and the food served, which included palav, fresh fruits, dried fruits and nuts, and bread.

The traditional costumes and jewelry worn by the student ushers also added much color and authenticity to the celebration.

The student performances showcased cultural dances, practices such as the traditional style of courting, marriage ceremonies, and greeting techniques.

One of the most appealing themes featured in the student performances was that of Sufiism, a mystical interpretation of Islam that is intertwined with religious and cultural practices across the Middle East, South Asia, and Central Asia.

Year 12 student Alisher Kukanbekov and Year 10 student Nekbakht Alibekova took the audience into a trance with their mesmerizing Sufi



**Zarina Mamadbekova.**

PHOTOS BY RAHIM KARA

dance, and one of the youngest performers, Isminoz Jamshedova of Year 7 tugged on everyone's heartstrings by passionately singing the Persian poet Hafiz Shirazi's verses.

The intricate details of the decorations, giveaways, food, music, and powerful performances required months of planning and preparation.

The show was a proud celebration of Tajik culture, and relayed an important message through student monologues about the importance of identity and connection with one's cultural heritage.

Ms. Sinavbarova said, "Through showcasing the celebration of Novruz, our Tajik students opened our eyes to the reality that today, humanity greater than ever before needs an in-depth sense of ethics, love, unity, and of course cooperation.

The verse by Saadi Sherozi, which is inscribed on the United Nation's building entrance was beautifully recited by Zarina Mamadbekova and captured the main theme of the show: Human beings are members of a whole, in creation of one essence and soul."

Moreover, the student performers encouraged members of the audience to reflect on their own identity as well.

"In these extremely divisive times, where identities are in constant crisis, asserting who you are in context is not just desirable but essential.

"By initiating an event of this magnitude and grandeur, without losing its core essence which is a celebration of one's roots and one's pride in cultural identity – is a favour these students have done to the rest of us more than to themselves," said Mr. Shouquot Hussain, Senior School Diploma Programme Coordinator.

"The student engagement was immersive, and at the same time inclusive. They were saying how you can retain selfhood while being a part of the main. And they said it beautifully," stated Mr. Hussain.

The Aga Khan Strand of Pluralism, one of the focal points of the curriculum at the Academy, encourages students to celebrate diversity.

Events such as Pamir: Roof of the World are not only entertaining and educational but also showcase the strength that lies in co-existing peacefully and respectfully by appreciating and learning from cultures different than our own.