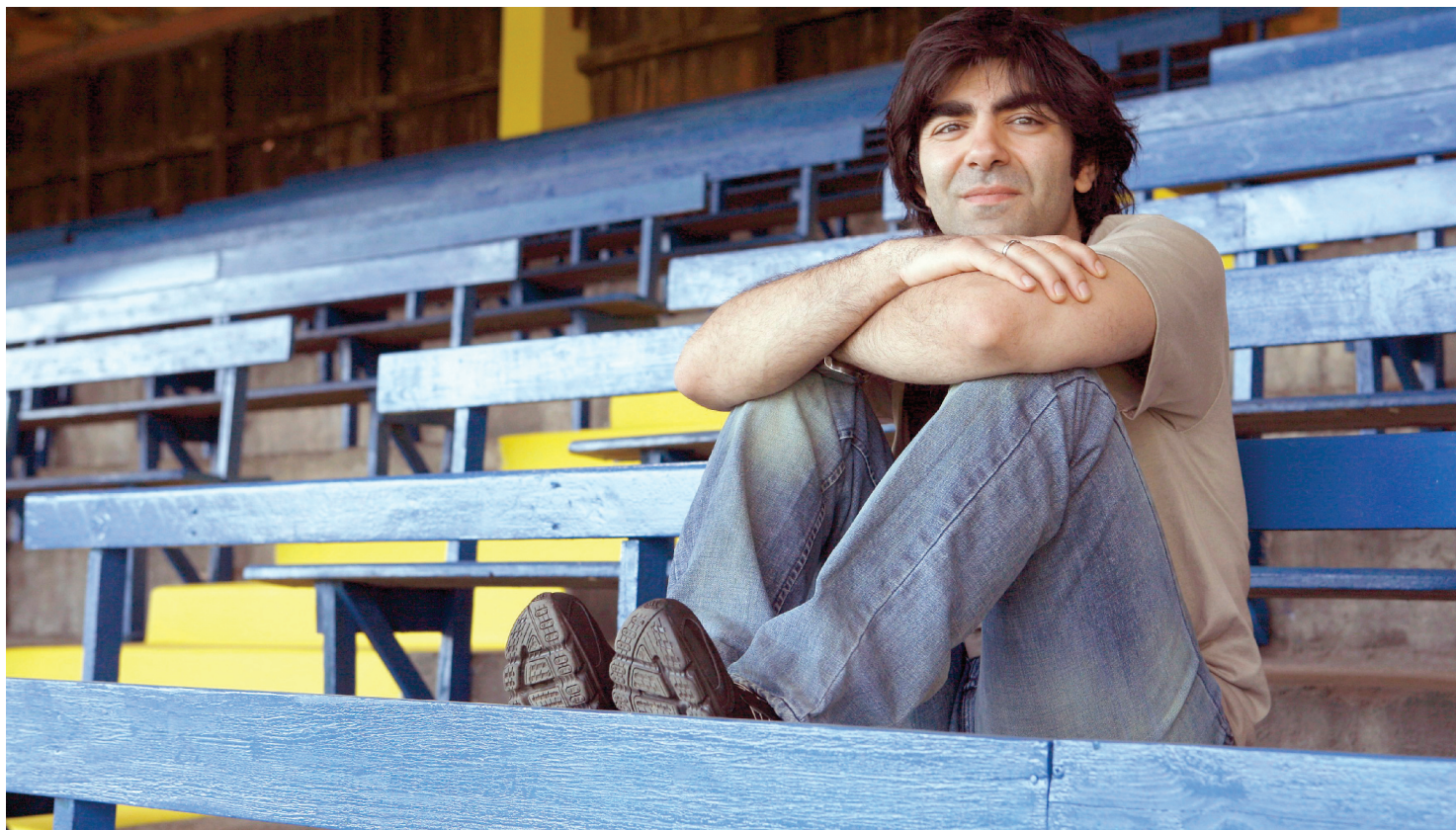


showbiz



* Turkish director Fatih Akin's masterclass was not officially open to the Festival delegates or guests.

Too many cooks ...

Distinguished guests are being stood up by inattentive hosts of the International Film Festival of India, rues **Gautaman Bhaskaran**

Goa has a new halo. At an International Film Festival of India party, one of the organisers took the microphone and asked the guests what "Goa" stood for. Of course nobody had a clue. It stands for "God's Own Abode", he answered himself. There was thunderous applause. So, some of the guests quipped, Kerala has competition. "God's Own Country" has "God's Own Abode" to reckon with.

But the Festival, now on in Goa, hardly seems to be God's Own. With a whopping budget of Rs80mn (with another Rs40mn reportedly coming

from sponsors), the conveniences are scandalously inadequate.

Here is one telling example. A few nights ago, a little past midnight, renowned Polish director Jan Jakub Kolski, whose excellent cinema is part of the Festival's much publicised, much honoured retrospective, found himself stranded without any transport after one of his own screenings.

Movie director and head of the L V Prasad Film and TV Academy in Chennai, K Hariharan, who happened to be with Kolski (and had hoped to hitch a ride back with him), tells me that they had to literally beg passing vehicles for a lift to their

hotel, Cida de Goa, located several miles away.

When confronted with this issue, the Festival administration said that hospitality and transport were the responsibility of the State Government's Entertainment Society of Goa. But who is going to understand this? Not Kolski. Not anybody else from France or Germany or England or just about anywhere else. And, why should they?

It is sad that the most important guests of India's premium Festival are abandoned once they land in Goa, and appear to be facing the most trying times. I wonder whether

these men will even vaguely feel that they are in God's Own Abode!

The reason for such glitches is apparently the presence of too many organisations thoroughly spoiling, what used to be a wonderful Festival. The Directorate of Film Festivals, which conducts the 11-day annual cinema event, seems to be at loggerheads with the Entertainment Society, which controls hospitality and transport. Both are a sham this year.

To begin with, there are several Festival hotels this time, compared to just one in the past. Invited guests tell me that on arriving at the airport, nobody around had a clue

about the hotel they were supposed to be booked in. Some were sent to the wrong destinations, and they spent a good part of the day hotel hopping.

Also, the biggest advantage in having a single Festival hotel is that it facilitates easy interaction among journalists and movie-makers. Is this not what a festival is all about?

The transport for invited guests and others this year has been woefully inadequate. And with screenings and functions stretching late into the night, it is a nightmare to find transport back to one's hotel. What is worse, there really is no public transport system worth the name here.

If all is not well between the Society and the Directorate, the National Film Development Corp of India, which organises a four-day movie market during the Festival, appears to be getting more and more alienated from the main event.

The world over, market is an essential and integral part of a festival. But not so at Goa.

The Corp believes in a kind of exclusivity that is intimidating. Its impressive list of invitees this year, including celebrated Turkish helmer Fatih Akin, renowned critic Derek Malcolm, Venice Festival Director Marco Mueller and Cannes Festival Deputy General Delegate Christian Jeune among others were treated as "exclusives".

The much-needed interaction between them and the main Festival was not really encouraged. Akin's masterclass was not officially open to the Festival delegates or guests, and was held at Hotel Marriott, the market venue which is a 10-minute drive from the main Festival complex.

Malti Sahai, a former IFFI Director, felt it was such a pity that someone like Akin could not be seen at the Festival complex interacting with the guests and others. "A lot of people would have liked to have met him and even attend his class"; she added.

Obviously, a healthier co-ordination, co-operation and, above all, camaraderie, is essential if the Festival is to make an impact at all. Moreso if Goa is to remain the permanent Festival venue. The whispering campaign that began a couple of years ago to take the Festival back to Delhi and its huge Siri Fort complex has grown louder this year.

Love found in boat wreck

One of the most interesting entries at the Festival was Rituparno Ghosh's *Noukadubi* (Boat Wreck). Ghosh has always evoked extreme reactions. Some adore his work. Some hate it. But, like every other helmer anywhere in the world, Ghosh's palate is mix of movies that are touching and not so touching. *Noukadubi* (once made in Hindi as *Ghunghat*) has been inspired by Rabindranath Tagore's novel, written in 1904, though Ghosh sets his work in the 1930s. It is a lyrical, almost poetic, look at one of Tagore's hauntingly classic stories about how a boat accident on a swollen, storm swept river plays

havoc with the lives and emotions of four people. Kolkata law student Ramesh (played by Jisshu Sengupta) is deeply in love with Hemnalini (Raima Sen), but on his father's insistence and moved by a widow's plight, he marries her daughter Susheela. On their journey back from their village to Kolkata, their boat sinks.

When Ramesh wakes up after having been washed ashore, he finds a young woman in a bridal costume lying near him, and she is alive. Ramesh, who has never seen his own bride before (as was the custom then), assumes that the woman must indeed be his wife. Back in Kolkata, Ramesh and his new bride, Kamala (Riya Sen), gradually realise that both

had been married to different people. *Noukadubi* in its own languorous way, takes us towards the truth. This is first time that both the Sen sisters, granddaughters of the legendary Bengali actress, Suchitra Sen, have come together in a film, though they do not at any point of time share screen space. Much has been written about Raima, and obviously so. For, she is undoubtedly a good actress. However, Riya seems equally talented. Largely a part of the Bollywood commercial films circuit, Riya will surprise those who may have given up on her.

(Gautaman Bhaskaran has been watching IFFI for a quarter century.)



* A scene from *Noukadubi*, directed by Rituparno Ghosh, and shown at the IFFI.