

showbiz



* Scenes from *Vihir* and *Moner Manush* that being shown at the International Film Festival of India this year.



into a Bollywood circus. The power of the spectacle was so strong that most people preferred to watch the show that was happening on the streets, rather than the artistic, arthouse cinema that was being shown inside the near world class theatres.

In an important way, the weaknesses of the Directorate were being taken advantage of to wrest power from it. For one, it has had no permanent director for years. The last Director, Sahai, who helmed the Festival for over a decade was never given the designation. She remained the Deputy and later the Joint Director.

The present Director, S M Khan, has been part of India's bureaucracy for a long time, and those who have had the opportunity to move with him tell me that he had always been a very able officer. But, sadly, Khan is not a man of cinema. He has never made that claim either. To have appointed him as Director has been one of the follies of the Ministry.

Two, the Festival still remains one that is run with the help of brochures. At least, largely so. If a Festival is to reach a certain level of excellence, it needs to send its officers to similar events across continents. Only then can it hope to rustle up decent selections. I did not see anybody from the Festival at Venice this year. I did not see anybody at Abu Dhabi. Was there somebody at Berlin? I wonder.

Despite all this, the Festival this time appears to be one of the brightest in recent memory. A retrospective of Jim Jarmusch, the independent American filmmaker, will be one of the highlights. Shankar Mohan, Festival Joint Director and Artistic Curator, tells me that this is the first ever occasion that a retro of Jarmusch will be seen in India. "It is coup", he chuckles.

Other retrospectives will include those of Mira Nair, Polish helmer Jan Jakub Kolski and Cypriot director Michael Cacoyannis. Mexico and Sri Lanka will be the countries in focus, and there will be special sections on Taiwanese New Wave, contemporary Iranian cinema and Cannes 2010 Kaleidoscope. These are certainly very interesting.

Apart from these, there will be an International Competition of 18 movies, including three from India (Umesh Kulkarni's *Vihir*, Goutam Ghose's *Moner Manush* and Kaushik Ganguly's *Just Another Love Story*).

Finally, sections such as Cinema of the World and the Indian Panorama with 26 films would take us into amazingly varied regions with their fascinating stories, giving us hours of magical moments.

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The travails of an Indian film festival

The International Film Festival of India has been crying for stability, but has yet to find it, reports **Gautaman Bhaskaran**

The International Film Festival of India, which began on November 22, is one of the oldest in the world. First opened in 1952, though it began a regular annual run about two decades later, the giant cinema event has had an extremely troubled life.

Somewhat like two other historic movie festivals at Cannes and Venice — which have had their fair share of disruptions and derailments — the 11-day Indian extravaganza has been rolling and pitching over an extremely rough sea.

While, Cannes has steadied itself — at least over the past 20 years with organisational stability and excellent selections, Venice has been less fortunate.

The oldest in the world, having been founded in 1932, it has had the regrettable reputation of having as many directors as there had been governments. It is only in the past six years that Venice has enjoyed a modicum of constancy with Marco Mueller having taken over the helm of affairs in 2004.

Mueller has an illustrious reputation: he is a renowned historian, author and film critic who piloted celebrated film festivals like Rotterdam and Locarno.

Cannes had Giles Jacob since the late 1970s who helped make the festival the world's best. Jacob is still an integral part of the Festival, though in 2004, Thierry Fremaux, took over as the artistic director. Both men have been celebrated movie critics and writers with a keen sense and knowledge of cinema.

This is the kind of stability that the International Film Festival of India has been crying for, but is yet to find. This shortcoming bobs up and down the River Mandovi on whose banks the 41st chapter of the Festival has been unfolding.

For decades, the event led a gypsy existence, moving from city to city in India. It used to return to New Delhi every other year. As much as this was helpful in a country where most people could not travel to the capital to watch world cinema, the administrative challenges that it posed were frightening.

A former Festival director, Malti Sahai, never failed to tell me how she and her staff used up to 60% of their energy setting up or even creating an infrastructure in a new city every other year. "This leaves us with very little time to look at the most important aspect, selection of cinema", she rued.

Happily, the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, which runs the Festival, through one of its wings, Directorate of Film Festivals, decided to strip the event of its gypsy cloak. Panaji in Goa was chosen as the permanent venue in 2004, and admittedly it was splendid and scenic. The Festival complex bang on the banks of the Mandovi looked impressive, and the ambience was just right for the movies. So was the mood that the Goan culture of dance, music and mirth helped create.

But over these six years, Panaji has caused its own set of problems. For one, the state government has been obsessed with the idea of giving a different identity to the Festival. Goa argued that just about every major festival in the world

carried the name of the city where it was held: Berlin, Cannes, Venice, Tokyo, Melbourne, Marrakech, Dubai, Deauville and so on. So, why not call it the Goa International Film Festival. It still would not have carried the name of the city, Panaji, though. But never mind, Goa said.

Goa had a deeper motive. It was reportedly trying to hijack the Festival in a way, trying to pull it away from the effective control of the Directorate. In fact, I did see on a couple of occasions how the name had been tampered with to make "Goa" a part of it. If my memory serves me right, it was termed Goa International Film Festival of India.

Behind this war, subtle though, was the Entertainment Society of Goa that over the years began to control a part of the Festival. Hospitality, travel, guest lists, celebrities and even a movie section where the latest mainstream Bollywood fare was screened.

The essential danger, as I saw it, lay in the fact that the Society was eager to rope in Mumbai's cinema fraternity, and there was certainly one year when the Festival turned