

## Report on the 10<sup>TH</sup> Dhaka International Film Festival 2008

By: Hasneen Mujarrad

The 10th edition of the Dhaka International Film Festival (DIFF) was held in Dhaka from January 10th to 18th, 2008. The festival has been organized by the Rainbow Film Society since 1992, initially as an annual event and subsequently biannually. This year, we had planned to showcase around 145 films from 49 countries in 12 sections. However, toward the end of the final preparatory stage, we were faced with several obstacles from the authorities that almost forced us to consider calling off the festival.

For one, censorship fee and screening fee for the censorship clearance from the Film Censor Board (Ministry of Information) were imposed on the festival. This was unprecedented – never since DIFF was launched in 1992, were we required to make such payments. Of course, as have always had to get the clearance and permission from the Censor Board. Bangladesh TK 10,000 per film of 90 min duration approx was charged. Hence, in the preparation of the budget for the 10th edition, this head was not included. Then, till the end of December, we tried with our limited abilities to find out some way to get waive from the censorship fee.

But, we failed at a certain stage we realised that in order to run the festival from Jan 10th, we had no other alternative but to go for the payment for individual titles in order for the film to be viewed by the authorities and get the clearance. Thunder storms were awaiting us!

How do we organise around 10-15 lakh Bangladeshi Taka to get the 145 films certified, temporarily though, for a non-commercial film festival limited to 2-3 screenings of a single film ? There were two options left with us. First, to call off the festival. (Which is apparently so easy at any point of time) Second, to start the festival on schedule continuing in a minimalist way, of course focusing on the Australasian Competition and the Cinema of the World. With whatever limited source we could organise from personal loans, cutting down certain areas of the budget, we could finally place TK. 300.000 (around 3000 Euros) for only 29 titles to obtain the necessary clearance. We kept in mind the Competitive section first, because, we knew the jurors have already been invited, terms and conditions mutually agreed upon, etc. Out of the 29 titles, we got clearance for 22 titles. (2 preview copies did not run there and 5 were declared not suitable for public screening).

So, these 22 and with 9 titles from Bangladesh, the final figure came to 31. Out of these 9 films were in competition. The rest was spread over in a couple of other sections. Normally an international film festival of some standard takes months and years to take a proper shape with detailed plan, programme, budget and kind support of well wishers, not to speak of the enormous labour of love and tears, night and day, hours and months. It also requires proper participation from all around the world in terms of films and personalities. We considered ourselves very fortunate this time in regards to procuring quality films from all corners of the world, including *Duska*, the OSCAR entry of 2008, from Netherlands as opening film of the festival. We also considered ourselves fortunate for getting EU, Dutch and Norwegian financial support in making the event successful.

For the first time, the festival included the Dhaka Talent Campus, a six-day workshop for aspiring young filmmakers, film critics and journalists. This parallel event, running from January 12th to 17th, aimed to utilise the ambience, resource and assembly of cinema

professionals as well as creative talents old and new. Each day's program consisted of four interactive 90-minute workshops, each session involving a presentation or discussion by one or more guest speakers. A total of 16 participants signed up for the Campus, which despite some hiccups proved to be very engaging.

We feel that a few words about the festival proper are in order here. Organising the festival over the last sixteen years has not always been hassle-free. There have also been organizational limitations. But the current edition had been seriously marred by problems that limited the number of films screened, and the rather elaborate Festival segments that were planned. The talent campus has however proceeded fairly smoothly. It drew upon local resources as well as foreign delegates, and featured discussions on the development of scripts, cinematography, digital photography, direction, acting, sound, the aesthetics of editing, etc. The regular international seminar segment of the festival was subsumed by the Talent Campus. A number of guests from the festival's programs were also invited to discuss their work to create an organic link between the Campus and the DIFF.

The topics for the Campus included both technical and critical issues. On the first count, presentations covered film screening, techniques of film making, designing a film production, directing the actor, theatre experience in relation to the film, screenplay etc.

Critical issues covered in the Campus presentations included: "Government Patronization of Regional Film with Special Reference to Assam" (Bobbeeta Sharma and Moloya Goswami, India); "Documentary Film: A Bangladeshi Perspective in Relation to World Documentary Filmmaking" (Manzare Hasin Murad, Bangladesh); "Censorship Problems in Third World Countries" (Ric Waiserman, USA) and "Georgian Film: The Soviet Era" (Salome Kikaleishvili, Georgia). The seminar sessions consisted of four sessions in the same format as the other Campus presentations. Peter Van Bueren of the Netherlands presented a paper titled "Aesthetics of Cinema: Critic and Reviewer" in the first session of the seminar. The second paper of the day was Mijarul Quayes' "Tracking the Nexus between Audience and Film". On the second day, Nenad Dukic of Serbia made a presentation on the role of the film critic in contemporary world cinema, and Alexis Krasilovsky of the US spoke on the challenges of independent filmmaking and the freedom to film.

The outcome of the Campus was mixed. It has undoubtedly been a good beginning, in that it has added value to the Festival. DIFF is no longer about films screened, experience shared or intellectual seminars. It has now moved on towards sustaining talent — of developing the filmmakers of tomorrow. Some of the sessions were more engaging than others, and sessions tended to be less interactive than expected. Keeping the sessions on schedule was also a problem. There is an interest among aspiring filmmakers to utilize the Campus as an opportunity both as a hands-on training workshop and an advanced filmmaking course. The first Dhaka Talent Campus has generated enthusiasm, and the first Campus should be able to provide a foundation on which to plan and prepare for the next Campus in 2010.

Everybody must have seen how tough it is to organise an international film festival over the years and also felt for us while we were facing the additional financial burden of censorship and screening fee to get clearance from the Censor Board. Yet, we tried to the best of our ability. It must have been noted that in none of the previous editions of the international film festival, the fest-management had to pay any sort of fees to apply for the clearance. Yet, we tried to do the needful.

As no one is perfect, similarly no international film festival can be devoid of flaws. Yet, with our limited resources, we always have wanted to put Bangladesh in the international calendar of film festivals. For the sake of cine-lovers, for the sake of film enthusiasts, for the sake of global film fraternity, of course, with the extended supportive hands of diplomatic missions of yours and a few others.

We believe, with extra care and earnest support, we shall be able to hold the 11th edition of the festival in 2010. Any lapse from our part, personally, I regret.

## **Australasian Competition**

### **• International Jury Awards**

1. Best Film *Kargaran Mashghoule Karand* (Men at Work)  
78 min, 2006, Directed by: Mani Haghighi (Iran)

2. Special Mention *Mad\_e in Bangladesh* (Bangladesh)  
85 min, 2006, Directed by: Mostafa Sarwar Farooki

### **International Jury**

1. Petrus van Bueren, Netherlands - Chairperson
2. Shamim Akhter, Bangladesh - Member Secretary
3. Alexis Krasilovsky, USA
4. Nenad Dukic, Serbia

### **• International Critics FIPRESCI Prize**

*Sankara*, 85 min, 2006,  
Directed by Prasanna Jayakody (Sri Lanka)

### **International Film Critics Federation (FIPRESCI) Jury**

1. Barbara Lorey de Lacharrière, France
2. Salome Kikaleishvili, Georgia
3. Mijarul Quayes, Bangladesh

### **• SIGNIS Award**

1. Best Film **Ghani** (The Cycle), 109 min, 2007  
Directed by Kazi Morshed (Bangladesh)

2. Special Mention **Cinta** (Malaysia), 107 min, 2006  
Directed by: Kabir Bhatia

### **Signis Jury**

1. Augustine Loorthusamy Pillai, Malaysia
2. Reverend Kamal Corraya, Bangladesh
3. Dr. Thomas Costa, Bangladesh

### **• Audience Award**

*Rupkothar Golpo*, (A Fairy Tale) 103 min, 2006,  
Directed by: Tauqir Ahmed (Bangladesh)