

cinema



* Indian actress and member of the Feature Film Jury Vidya Balan arrives at the Martinez Hotel in Cannes to attend a photo call of the Jury on the eve of the 66th edition of the Cannes Film Festival.

Gushing over Cannes

With India as the country of focus at the festival, the Indian media is on an overdrive, even at the point of being factually incorrect. **By Gautaman Bhaskaran**

The Indian media can be casual to the point of being factually incorrect when it comes to cinema. As the 66th edition of the Cannes Film Festival unrolled its bright red carpet on May 15, with India as the country of focus, newspapers and magazines as well as television channels have been gushing over the country's participation. Some of them have not been bothering to check facts, publishing absolutely erroneous pieces of "news". Here are two examples.

The Hindustan Times had this to say before the Festival began. Talking about Sonam Kapoor (with a special appearance in *Bombay Talkies* to be shown at the Festival as a tribute to 100 years of Indian cinema), the daily (or was it its web edition) writes: This year will mark Sonam Kapoor's third visit to

Festival de Cannes. A source close to the actor reveals, 'She will be present at the opening ceremony of the Festival on May 15 and will walk the red carpet the following day as well.'

And it seems she will be the only Indian present at the inaugural ceremony. Her spokesperson confirms this news: 'Sonam will be the sole representative from Bollywood on the opening night. She will be there before the Indian contingent arrives on May 17 for various screenings and red-carpet events ...'

Whether anybody else walked the red carpet on the opening night or not, Amitabh Bachchan did. For, he had a cameo in the Festival's inaugural movie, Baz Luhrmann's *The Great Gatsby*. So did daughter-in-law Aishwarya Rai.

The Hindustan Times also forgot that there were two Indian film

actresses (one is also a director) on the Cannes juries, Vidya Balan and Nandita Das. Both were on the red carpet and introduced to the audience on the opening night. But of course.

Christian Jeune, Deputy General Delegate and number two after Festival Director Thierry Fremaux, had affirmed the above names in an e-mail sent to me from Cannes. He also wrote in reply to a question that the South Indian superstar, Rajnikanth, was to have walked the red carpet on May 15, but subsequently declined.

(Rajnikanth was to have been at Cannes with the trailer of daughter Soundarya's *Kochadaiyaan* in which he stars. A paper screamed some days ago that he would be on the Croisette (Cannes' beach front) with his movie. Sorry, with the trailer, not the film, which is not yet ready. And now the actor himself has

dropped out.) So, where then is the question of Sonam Kapoor being the sole Bollywood representative on the Festival's first night. Does the actress know that her name is being tarnished, maybe by her PR team, which seems to be on an overdrive? Hence, overkill.

Cannes — in the incredibly picturesque south of France, by the glistening waters of the Mediterranean Sea, and once the playground of the rich and the famous — has been perennially used by Indian moviemakers/PR guys to gain cheap publicity.

Media advertisements and reports have often in the past spoken of Indian films being at the Festival. They have been, though not in the Festival, but in the market. And, any Tom, Dick and Harry or any Jill, Jane and Jacqueline can show his or her movie at the market, by hiring a screening room — of which a dozen are available. However, a screening in the market does in no way give a film the right to honour itself with a Cannes tag.

The Festival has but two main sections, Competition and A Certain Regard, and a few minor segments, like Out of Competition, Special Screenings and Midnight Screenings. Even the prestigious

Directors' Fortnight and Critics' Week — which run along with the Festival — are not considered part of it, undoubtedly the world's most glamorous and biggest.

Sadly, helmers Anurag Kashyap, Dibakar Banerjee, Karan Johar and Zoya Akhtar — each of whom made a segment in *Bombay Talkies* — were not at Cannes on the opening night. They will arrive later in time for the screening of their movie.

It is quite likely that they did not want to stay on much longer than the normal three days' hospitality the Festival gives to men from cinema.

India parties

The National Film Development Corporation of India hosted the opening party of the Cannes Film Market on May 16. Befitting of the India Year! And, not surprisingly, 132 Indian movie professionals are planning to be at Cannes this year with important players like UTV, Viacom 18 and Dar Motion Pictures ready to clinch deals.

The Corporation will celebrate Ritesh Batra's *Dhaba* at the India Pavillion on the beach with a cocktail on May 18. The film, co-produced by the Corporation, screens in the Critics' Week.

There are glaring misses this year. One, though the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting is planning to host an official dinner after *Bombay Talkies* (chosen by Cannes to mark 100 years of Indian cinema) plays on May 19, there is no India Party — which had been a part of the Festival for some years now. It used to be called Incredible India. Maybe, Manmohan Singh's government, struggling to wriggle out of one scam after another, felt that the country was no longer as incredible as it had been!

Also missing this year would be the presence of Nina Lath Gupta, the Corporation's Managing Director. She is reportedly unwell and has been medically advised not to travel.

Incidentally, Gupta was largely instrumental in envisaging and creating the India Pavillion on the Cannes beach some years ago. The pavillion has over the years got better, and in 2011, it looked positively alluring — giving a run for the innumerable pavillions set up along the sea-front by different countries and cinema companies.

However, there has been criticism against the NFDC and the India Pavillion. Was any worthwhile business being conducted at all there? Had it become a mere centre for the mid-day halt of weary accredited visitors looking refreshment and small talk?

Would we ever know?

(Gautaman Bhaskaran has covered Cannes for more than two decades, and is back there for some great cinema, and he may be e-mailed at gautamanb@hotmail.com)