

Red Sea Film Festival to have two Indian titles in competition

GAUTAMAN BHASKARAN

Time was when there was no movie festival in the Middle East. Till Dubai and Abu Dhabi, two of the seven States of the United Arab Emirates, decided to follow Cannes, Venice and Berlin and have their own festivals. The one in Dubai became highly popular with stars from all over the world, including Hollywood and Bollywood, descending on the desert city. Soon Abu Dhabi followed suit. While Dubai was glamorous and starry, Abu Dhabi was a quieter affair.

However, things did not last, and the Festivals drew their screens.

I think, despite a very old festival at Cairo and another in Marrakech, Saudi Arabia felt that there could be a need for one more – and which was seen as the Kingdom's push towards cultural and artistic liberalisation. And Jeddah (Saudi Arabia) began playing host, and its Red Sea International Film Festival is all set to open its fourth edition on 4 December.

A look at the selections tells me that there is an interesting assortment of movies from many parts of the world. The Festival will begin its 10-day roll with Karim Shenawy's *The Tales of Daye's Family* from Saudi Arabia that talks about the agony and angst of a 14-year-old boy with a golden voice. But his skin discolouration (with a lack of pigment) leads to his father abandoning him and peers ridiculing him. However, his family decides to take him to Cairo for an audition – a journey that turns out to be dangerously harrowing. His fight to survive moves his country, Egypt, to tears. As the note on the film says, "it is a poignant exploration of tolerance, ambition and unwavering familial bond".

Red Sea will end with an American title, *Modi-Three Days On The Wings Of Madness*, helmed by Johnny Depp. Tracing the life of a Bohemian, Amedeo Modigliani, the movie unfolds in 1916



Paris, a city in the throes of war, deprivation and bankruptcy. The man and his friends lead a life of debauchery with drugs and alcohol. They create art but fail to sell it. It is then that an American art collector (Al Pacino) throws a lifeline, but Modigliani messes up the splendid opportunity.

Between the opening and closing night, there are 16 titles in competition – one of the many sections in the Festival. Reema Kagit's Indian movie, *Superboys of Malegaon* traces the life of an amateur cinema director, Nasir Shaikh, hailing from the impoverished town of Malegaon. It is a funny tale of his as he tries his hand at filmmaking. He collects a motley group of friends and sets about getting his work off the ground. As the locals prefer Bollywood dramas, he incorporates some of the highlights from this genre.

Also from India is *Songs of Adam*

from Oday Rasheed. A fantasy about a boy who refuses to age and the village he lives in begins to believe that he is cursed. A haunting and beautiful plot set in the oasis of Iraq.

The Palestinian work, *To A Land Unknown*, talks about two boys who escape from a Lebanese refugee camp. They want to go to Germany, but with no money or passport, they resort to scams and petty crimes in director Mehdi Fleifel's take on shame and scandal and desperation.

Tunisia's offering, *Red Path*, is blood and gore personified. Helmed by Lotfi Achour, it shows the horror of beheading. A shepherd boy witnesses the dastardly

scene of his cousin being decapitated by Islamic terrorists and is forced to carry the head to the victim's family. Traumatic and terrible, the work then shows how the shepherd deals with the shock and pain.

Austria and Jordan will arrive in Jeddah with *Moon*, directed by Kurdwin Ayub. About a martial arts champion, Sarah, the work is a thriller, a life in a golden cage!

Taiwan will also figure in competition with *Sima's Song*, which is an amazing testament to the courage and pluck of Afghani women.

The writer, a senior movie critic and author, will cover the Red Sea International Film Festival