

FILM FESTIVALS GET STAR POWER IN



Actors Gajraj Rao (above right) and Ronit Roy (right) are hopeful that Deepika Padukone will take the MAMI film festival's popularity to the next level
PHOTO: (ABOVE) VIRAL BHAYANI; (ABOVE RIGHT) RAAJESSH KASHYAP; (RIGHT) AMAL KS

Decision to elect actor Deepika Padukone as a film festival body's head is earning plaudits

Anurag Singh Bohra

After professional commitments forced filmmaker Kiran Rao to step down from her position as chairperson of Mumbai Academy of Moving Image (MAMI), actor Deepika Padukone was voted as her successor in January. It's the first time a mainstream Bollywood actor has been chosen for heading a film festival body, and the industry is excited. Both experts and celebs see it as a welcome change and feel that Deepika's appointment might pave the way for more mainstream figures in influential positions.

A WELCOME MOVE FOR BOLLYWOOD

MAMI director and film critic Anupama Chopra says, "Deepika graciously accepted it when the MAMI board put it to her that we would like her to be the chairperson. So, we're all very happy with her appointment. Deepika has also been on our board of trustees for a few years." Actor Gajraj Rao feels

Padukone's appointment as the new chairperson would benefit the organisation in the long run. "In the past few years, MAMI has done some amazing work towards the betterment of Hindi cinema," says Rao. "I have full faith that a sensible actor and person like Deepika will take MAMI's popularity to the next level," he adds.

MAINSTREAM ACTORS ATTRACT WIDER AUDIENCE

Actor Ronit Roy opines that while it is usually seen that a film director or producer heads a film festival body, the appointment of Padukone, a young, relevant mainstream star, will bridge the gap between industries and audiences and make cinema universal.

"I'm sure under the discerning eye of an award-winning actor like Deepika, the festival will reach out further and attract a wider selection of world cinema," he says.

NEED TO CONNECT WITH YOUNGSTERS

Anupama Chopra feels that film festivals need to be forward-looking and it is, therefore, important for them to connect with the youth. She says, "We are in

an age where the entire entertainment business is going through reinvention. When people have any film of their choice on their phones, then you've to connect with them and say, this is why we need to have a film festival (and not watch films on their smartphones). So, it's very important to connect with young people and get them to come to film festivals. That's what will keep the festival flourishing into the next 20 years. MAMI has completed its 20 years in 2018. I think Deepika's connect with the youth will definitely go a long way in enabling the same."

NO, SHE'S NOT GOING TO BE WORKING DAILY

Given the fact that, Padukone is going to be super busy with projects, there is a concern about her commitment to the position of the chairperson of the film festival.

However, Chopra says, "We don't expect her to be sitting at the MAMI office every day, as that's not the role of a chairperson. She's not going to be hands-on the day-to-day running of the festival but she's always been extremely supportive. We have worked with her already for few years and it will be more of the same."

Asked about the work tenure of Padukone, Chopra says, "There's no term condition put in Deepika's appointment." ■ anurag.bohra@htlive.com

Women no longer need permission from men to travel, says Dia Mirza



Actor-producer Dia Mirza has been travelling alone since she was 16

Actor-producer Dia Mirza, who started travelling alone at the age of 18, has observed a change in the patriarchal mindset regarding solo women travellers, and she considers it empowering. Dia took her first flight and went to Thailand along with one of her female friends after winning a beauty pageant in 2000.

"Even before that, I used to travel by bus when I was 16. I used to do modelling, and travelled from Hyderabad to Bengaluru. I remember my parents used to drop me at the bus depot and told the fellow passenger just to keep an eye on me. I used to reach my destination and call them to say that I am safe," the actor says.

What changes has she seen in the society's attitude towards solo women travellers? Dia says, "A girl does not have to seek permission from a man, or from the society to go out there to explore the world, she just needs her own

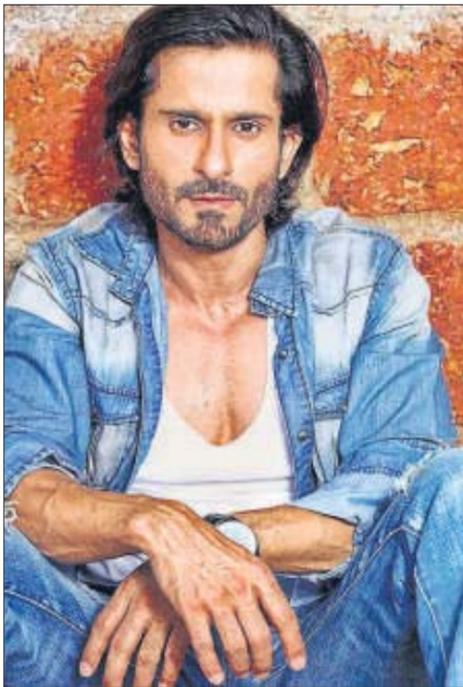
permission. I think that is empowering."

She adds, "That a girl cannot be on her own, comes from a patriarchal mindset. It comes from the mindset that a woman must be protected, they are weak when a girl travels solo, and I mean travelling anywhere — going on a vacation, going to work or to study abroad or anything that they do."

"But there's a shift in social conditioning that allows women to follow their choice to travel alone, travel free," the Sanju (2018) actor explains, adding that solo travelling is not just liberating but also helps one understand how to be comfortable in your own company and look after your own self.

"The sense of safety comes from within. It is really of inner confidence. As an individual, you have to know that you can do this... It is inner voice really," asserts Dia.

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Actor Amit Sarin, who was seen in TV shows Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi and Pavitra Rishta, has moved to the US for a shot at a Hollywood career

Amit Sarin's Hollywood dream is his wife's too

Rishabh Suri

Actor Amit Sarin, who was seen on television shows such as Kyunki Saas Bhi Kabhi Bahu Thi and Pavitra Rishta, has shifted base to Los Angeles, United States, to pursue his Hollywood dream. He is currently working on a film that is being directed by Dwight Little, the man behind the film Anaconda: The Hunt for the Blood Orchid, and the TV show A.G.E.N.T.S. of Shield.

"The film is about species of animals getting extinct, and how the same happened with the legendary Bengal tiger... We are finalising the cast and in talks with a leading actor. I, too, star in the film," shares Amit about the project, adding that it is to be shot in India.

Interestingly, he is starring in another film that will be directed by his wife Vineesha, who is also his partner in his Hollywood dream. "It had been going for a long time. The

whole process was not easy from my stand point. While I was doing acting on Indian TV, my wife was pursuing an Indian TV, my wife was pursuing this Hollywood dream. She has a New York background, even though she has been living in India for the last 20 years. She had once met actor Al Pacino. He was her idol, and she decided 'this is what I have to do as a maker'. She wanted to be a filmmaker and writer. I met him, too, that's what gave us power and strength to go ahead, and that we can make it happen," he explains.

And striving for their dream made everything come together. "It took us five years to get funding and everything. The last three years were very aggressive in the sense that we were getting a good response to our projects, yes and no from people. It's a unique position we are in," says Amit.

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Beyoncé and Jay-Z to be honoured as LGBTQ+ allies

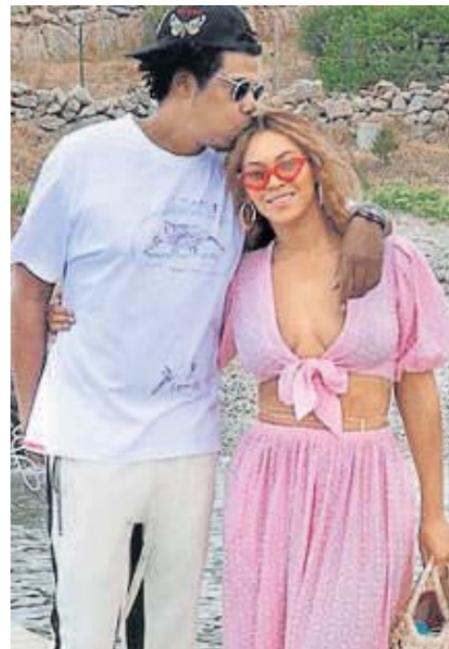
Singer Beyoncé and husband, rapper Jay-Z are getting recognised for their achievements outside of the field of music — the power couple will be honoured at the GLAAD (Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation) Media Awards for accelerating LGBTQ acceptance.

GLAAD announced Monday that the Carters will receive its Vanguard Award at its 30th annual awards on March 28. The award honours "allies who have made a significant difference in promoting acceptance of LGBTQ people".

GLAAD said Beyonce, who has a large gay fanbase, is

being recognised for speaking out about marriage equality nationwide, for including members of the LGBTQ community in her music videos, and for dedicating a performance to the victims and survivors of the 2016 shooting incident at a gay nightclub in Orlando.

Jay-Z, who received the GLAAD Special Recognition Award last year for his song and video for Smile, which featured his mother Gloria Carter, who is a lesbian, is being honoured "because of his inclusion of LGBTQ artists in his work, from Janet Mock to James Baldwin, and for his support of marriage equality." AP



The Carters — rap icon Jay-Z and singer Beyoncé will be honoured with GLAAD's Vanguard Award for promoting acceptance of LGBTQ+ as musicians and public figures PHOTO: INSTAGRAM/BEYONCE

No endgame yet for Tom and the Russos

Actor Tom Holland is in talks to star in yet another Russo brothers' film — their adaptation of Nico Walker's novel Cherry.

Cherry tells the true life story of the author, a former Army medic who returned from Iraq with extreme undiagnosed PTSD and became addicted to opioids. He then began robbing banks, which eventually landed him in jail. Walker was caught and convicted in 2011 and is currently serving his sentence. He is scheduled to be released in 2020.

The new project will be

Tom Holland has worked with the Russo brothers in three Marvel films so far

PHOTO: JASON KEMPIN/APF

scripted by playwright and screenwriter Jessica Goldberg, who has earlier adapted the novel Exit West for the studio and was also the creator and executive producer of the series The Path.

Anthony and Joseph Russo will also produce along with the studio's president of production, Mike Larocca.

The makers acquired the rights to Nico Walker's best-seller Cherry in August. The film is set to go on floors this summer.

Holland has worked with the brothers on several Marvel films, including Captain America: Civil War (2016), Avengers: Infinity War (2018) and the upcoming Avengers: Endgame.

Holland is all set to reprise his role as Peter Parker in Spider-Man: Far From Home, which releases this summer.

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Taika Waititi to helm Time Bandits series



Taika Waititi is also directing space opera series The Mandalorian PHOTO: SHUTTERSTOCK

Thor: Ragnarok (2017) director Taika Waititi is set to helm the television adaptation of Terry Gilliam's 1981 fantasy flick Time Bandits, which is currently in development.

The original film told the crazy, multidimensional story of an English youngster, Kevin, who discovers his wardrobe contains a time hole. A group of six dwarves come through the hole and proceed to lead Kevin on a series of adventures across history, making stops in ancient Greece, the Middle Ages, Napoleonic times and the early 1900s, before confronting Evil when they arrive at the Fortress of Ultimate Darkness.

The film starred Gilliam's fellow Monty Python collaborator John Cleese, Sean Connery and The Lord of the Rings actor Ian Holm.

Waititi will direct and co-write the pilot, as well as executive produce alongside Gilliam and Dan Halsted, the man behind the films Garden State (2004) and The Virgin Suicides (1999).

Waititi was also recently announced as one of several directors for the Star Wars series and the upcoming space opera web series The Mandalorian.

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