

INTERNATIONAL NEWS BRIEFS

PACIFIC OVERTURES

Notes From the Pacific Rim *by Francesca Dinglasan*

LEAD STORY: CINEMA BOMBINGS KILL 17, INJURE HUNDREDS

DHAKA, BANGLADESH—Nearly 200 people were injured and 17 killed as a result of a series of explosions that occurred in several packed cinema auditoriums in Bangladesh. According to local police reports, the bomb attacks were carefully planned to inflict the maximum damage to human life, with the four targeted movie halls crowded with people celebrating the Muslim Eid al-Fitr festival. Doctors on the scene have speculated that the explosives were planted somewhere along the floor of the theatres, judging by the serious injuries to the legs and lower halves of bodies belonging to the victims. Though the terrorist organization al-Qaeda has been rumored to be behind the bombings, local officials claim that they have not yet determined the responsible party.

MAJOR GROWTH IN THAILAND

BANGKOK—According to industry reporters, Thai exhibition giant Major Cineplex will be investing nearly 800 million baht (US\$18.6 million) in a brand-new theatrical complex to anchor a luxury entertainment and shopping destination located in Bangkok's Siam Square. Local land planner Siam Paragon Development, with which Major Cineplex has reached an agreement to operate a proposed 20,000-square-foot cinema, is currently developing the retail complex, dubbed Siam Paragon. Under terms of the deal, Major Cineplex will lease the space for 25 years, during which time it will manage a multiscreen moviehouse and bowling alley. Grand opening for both the cinema and the mall is slated for 2005.

In additional news, Major Cineplex, which owns Thailand's only IMAX Theatre, has revealed predictions that the giant-screen venue in Bangkok will see admissions jump by 20 percent to 480,000 by the end of this year. Among the initiatives being launched by the exhibitor to ensure the improvement in ticket sales is a promotional campaign touting the IMAX 3-D cinema to tourists. The company, which plans to spend between 10 million to 20 million baht (US\$230,000 to US\$460,000) on its marketing campaign, has submitted requests to the national tourist authority as well as travel agencies to include the Bangkok IMAX Theatre on maps.

GOLDEN VILLAGE'S IMAXIMUM IMPACT

SINGAPORE—Another Asian exhibitor that has set its eye on IMAX is Golden Village, which recently brought the large-format theatre to Singapore. A joint venture between Oz-based Village Roadshow and Hong Kong's Golden Harvest, Golden Village has invested US\$2.5 million to renovate an existing 315-seat theatre to accommodate IMAX theatrical equipment. Though tickets to IMAX screening are much higher than the average price of admissions, with adults paying \$11 on weekdays and \$13 on weekends for the large-format theatre, Golden Village estimates that it will be able to recuperate its initial investment within the next five years.

LUNAR ECLIPSES MELBOURNE COMMUNITY

DANDENONG, AUSTRALIA—Like outdoor exhibition in the United States, ozoners in Australia have been on the decline since their heyday several decades ago. However, some signs of revival

are becoming apparent, including news that the Lunar Drive-In Theatre was launched a few months ago in the community of Dandenong, located in the Melbourne area. Sitting on the site of the former Panoramic Drive-In, the two-screen Lunar is operated by partners Matthew Kilderry and Anthony Madigan. The outdoor theatre offers patrons such concessions choices as chef-prepared burgers, popcorn and Cokes and features such technological amenities as Dolby stereo FM sound and the largest new movie screens in the territory. Management at the Lunar plans to have a total of four screens operating in the near future.

PRIVATE INVESTORS' PARAMOUNT INTEREST

WELLINGTON—Historic moviehouse the Paramount was recently purchased by a group of local investors headed by businessman Dan Slevin. Slevin told local industry reporters that he plans to continue the tradition established at the Paramount, which prides itself as offering an alternative to corporate-run multiplexes. Former Paramount owner Kerry Robins cited a desire to focus on his other exhibition interest, the Embassy Theatres, as his reason for selling the 84-year-old Paramount.

NEW ZEALAND THEATRE GOES STADIUM STYLE

PALMERSTON NORTH, N.Z.—The Cinema 8 multiplex in the New Zealand community of Palmerston North has been slated for a refurbishment that will transform the theatre into a stadium-style venue. Though the updating process is expected to take approximately 18 months to complete, the first auditorium to undergo renovation opened in time for the hotly anticipated feature, "The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers." First opened in 1990, the Cinema 8 has been a favorite with local moviegoers, with the theatre counting more than 500,000 turnstile turns for the 12 months ended March 2002—a 10 percent improvement over the same period a year ago.

NO THEATRE DROUGHT AT THE SAHARA

NEW DELHI—The Sahara India Group has entered into a deal with Inox Leisure Ltd. that will see the former company manage operations of a cineplex anchoring the Sahara Mall in the town of Gurgaon. The four-screen theatre complex, which is currently under development, will comprise 37,000 square feet and hold nearly 1,100 seats. The cinema will offer a virtual-reality gameroom, food court and bars, with programming to include English-language, Hindi and regional feature films.

FALSE BOMB THREAT FORCES CINEMA CLOSURES IN SOUTH KOREA

SEOUL—A bomb threat that ultimately proved harmless recently resulted in the evacuation of hundreds of people from crowded movie theatres in central and southern Seoul. Local police, acting on an anonymous phone call, rushed to search two separate cinemas for explosives, finding only one suspicious object on the eighth floor of the building of one of the theatres. As it turned out, the device only had a timing mechanism and no explosive, and the theatre was allowed to reopen for business within an hour. The caller had originally demanded that authorities wire 20 million won (US\$22,200) into his bank account, but his order was completely ignored.