

cinema



* Actor and director Kamal Hassan seen during a promotional event for his upcoming Tamil, Telugu and Hindi tri-lingual film *Viswaroopam* in Mumbai last week.

prestigious Cannes Film Festival has bent its rules and extended its deadline to March 15, to accommodate Kamal Hassan's *Viswaroopam* in its competitive section.

"Busy with the Hindi and Tamil dubbing, when contacted, Hassan said, 'At the moment, I can't discuss my plans for Cannes, because we're really trying hard to complete the film on time. But yes, the Cannes Film Festival is keen on having *Viswaroopam*. I am in constant touch with Christian Jeune from the Festival. She's keeping a track of our progress.

"A 9-member Cannes jury will view the film and then decide its fate. I am confident we've made a remarkable film, and we need no endorsement. But Cannes is special. We're definitely doing our best to get there on time,' he added."

This report is full of howlers, and it beats me how the writer and the paper let it go without even a cursory check. Now here are the facts.

Christian Jeune, Deputy General Delegate (a man, not a woman), effectively the No.2 at Cannes after Thierry Fremaux, told me that *Viswaroopam* was indeed in the race for selection at the festival. So are any number of other Indian movies. And the deadline is March 16, the scheduled one. So, there is no question of the deadline having been extended for Hassan.

What is even more ridiculous is the headline which says in no uncertain terms that *Viswaroopam* has already been chosen by Cannes. The Festival will announce its official selection only on April 19, roughly three weeks before the 12-day cinematic event begins on the French Riviera in mid-May.

Cannes, and I should know, having covered it for 21 years, follows a very strict procedure in its selections. It chooses celebrated and well-known helmers as it does promising/budding talent. Many directors who went on to become legendary and brilliant were discovered at Cannes. Satyajit Ray with his first work, *Pather Panchali* (Song of the Little Road), and Italy's Nanni Moretti (who will head the Festival's main jury this year) were among the many in whom Cannes saw excellence.

Gilles Jacob, who is now the Festival's honorary chief, said on Moretti being appointed president of the jury: "When we decided to put *Ecce Bombo* — a Super 8 film (made by Moretti) — into Competition when I first arrived in 1978, it was because I had a premonition that Nanni Moretti would soon become NANNI MORETTI. This is what happened and I am so gratified to have had this long and affectionate collaboration."

The Festival's ability to see beyond what is apparent paid off as we all know. Ray and Moretti became masters.

Many Indian newspapers and television channels appear oblivious of all this — or just do not seem to care — merrily printing and airing stories that are incorrect. The media has a sense of responsibility that it must uphold as sacredly as possible.

More than all this, I would be very sad if Kamal himself believes that his film is already in. It appears so, or why would he have said that a nine-member jury (which is the composition of the Festival's main jury) would decide on *Viswaroopam's* fate. This clearly conveys that the movie has already been chosen, and that too in the top competition slot.

I will not be surprised if Kamal says he was misquoted.

(Gautaman Bhaskaran will be covering the Cannes Film Festival this year, and may be contacted at gautamanb@hotmail.com.)

The ways of the media

By Gautaman Bhaskaran

In the early years of 2000, I remember being introduced to a delegation of Japanese filmmakers and actors as "a very important writer and movie critic from India". This was in Tokyo, and I was part of a 19-member group of Indian film directors, writers and critics. The lady who did the honours was an Indian movie editor, and she added that "I was an upright critic". She probably meant that I could not be bought over.

She went on to become the director of an important movie festival in India, but never once invited this "upright" critic to her event. Even in Chennai, where I have been living for close to three decades, I am never invited for the press show of any Tamil film. The reasons became obvious to me after several years.

I am not pliable, but of course. And I am

a critic in the absolute sense of the term. I speak my mind. However, I do watch just about every Tamil movie that opens in Chennai, as I do any other language film. I pay for my own ticket and call myself truly free and fearless.

Sadly, journalism in India — and that can be in any discipline — has degenerated into a money-spinner. Journalists have no qualms about taking money or gifts in return for publishing "positive" stories, reviews included. The movie guys are happy, and the journalists are happy.

In this mad scramble to make money, accuracy and fairness are thrown out of the window. Indian film critics/journalists, at least by and large, do neither check facts nor infuse a sense of balance in what they write. The result: lopsided stories and reviews that may well be promotional campaigns.

Last week, several Indian papers carried stories about Tamil superstar Kamal Hassan's

latest movie, *Viswaroopam*, being featured at the Cannes Film Festival. The festival begins on May 16.

The *Times of India*, for one, headlined: *Viswaroopam to be screened at Cannes Film Festival*.

The story that followed was: "*Viswaroopam* is to be screened at the prestigious Cannes Film Festival this year. All work is on in this direction.

"According to trade sources, the administrators of the Cannes Film Festival have extended the deadline for submission of films under this category so that *Viswaroopam* may join in.

"That is the respect the 'Ulaganayagan' (global star) Kamal Haasan commands in the world cinema, states sources in the tinsel town. The climax of *Viswaroopam* is now being shot in Mumbai and is expected to be wrapped up very soon.

"This story is one of its kind. The