

The New York Indian Film Festival is getting bigger, better and exciting, writes Arun Kumar

IT could become the Indian counterpart to Sundance. This year's New York Indian Film Festival (NYIFF) still features Indian independent and diaspora films, but each year "it's getting to be bigger, better and more exciting than the last," says its creator Aroon Shivdasani.

Having it in spring instead of winter — it's in May — will ensure a lot of action inside and outside the theatres, said Shivdasani, executive director of the Indo-American Arts Council (IAAC) in New York.

"We intend each year to be bigger, better and more exciting than the last," Shivdasani, who created the first Indian Film Festival in the US back in 2001 soon after 9/11, said in an interview. In fact, "We want to establish NYIFF as the Indian counterpart to Sundance, add a film bazaar, grow the festival to a whole week of screenings, panels, awards, special events, international interest," she said.

"We want to make it THE festival for independent and diaspora films from the Indian subcontinent."

The 11th annual edition of the May 4-8 festival film in Manhattan will present Disney's first-ever live action Hindi film *Do Dooni Chaar*, starring the actor couple Rishi Kapoor and Neetu Singh, on the opening night.

New York City's prestigious Paris Theatre will host the

It's showtime



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star-studded red carpet on May 4 with the Habib Faisal-directed film, which marks the Hollywood studio's first live-action production in India.

"The closing night celebrations coincide with Rabindranath Tagore's birthday so we will feature a Rabindrasangeet rendition of the Indian National Anthem and Rituparno Ghosh's Tagore film *Naukadubi* just prior to our exciting award ceremony," she said.

Shivdasani said she conceived of the festival "as a response to Mayor (Rudy) Giuliani's call to New Yorkers to help a limping city back to action immediately after 9/11."

"It started with 12 Indian diaspora films in one theatre. We now have a five-day festival of red carpet galas, more than 55 features, documentaries and shorts, an award ceremony, special events, industry panels, nightly networking parties, tonnes of media attention and packed audiences."

Apart from the film festival, IAAC's other interests include a music festival, a potential literary festival, a fabulous annual dance festival, which has attracted amazing reviews from the New York Times as well as all the dance magazines, Shivdasani said.

IAAC also does standalone book launches, an annual travelling art exhibition which showcases Indian contemporary art of the diaspora at museums and galleries on the east coast, several theatrical productions and an annual playwrights festival.

One of the most influential tastemakers in the US — when it comes to the Indian arts scene, Shivdasani has also led the way with many charitable causes, including the celebrity auction at Christie's with Hillary Clinton, now the US secretary of state, soon after the 2004 tsunami in Asia.

— IANS



Aroon Shivdasani