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## Asia's top film festival opens in shadow of 'Parasite'

Organizers of Asia's top film festival, which opens in Busan this week, warn that a surge of global interest in the critically acclaimed South Korean movie "Parasite" masks a damaging underinvestment in local independent cinema. Bong Joon-ho's darkly comic tale of class war in the Seoul suburbs won the Palme D'or for best film at Cannes and is firming as an Oscar favorite next year, in what would be the first ever win for a Korean film.

It has been sold to 192 international markets—a record for a local production—and has already grossed just over \$90 million ahead of its highly anticipated October 11 release in the United States. The film is a crowning achievement for veteran director Bong, whose works have been lauded by the likes of Quentin Tarantino and two-time collaborator Tilda Swinton. His work has long been championed by the Busan International Film Festival, a gala event dedicated to both unearthing new independent Asian talent and connecting emerging filmmakers with financiers.

But Parasite's breakout success "hides a crisis" in the local film industry at large, said Nam Dong-chul, program director at BIFF. Nam said investors and cinema chains needed to help smaller independent productions find an audience in a market dominated by Hollywood-funded blockbusters. "We have indeed been lazy with building a strong foothold where new talents can blossom," he said. "We can take advantage of opportunity only when independent and art films have a stable market share."

## Star-studded program

Bong is not slated to appear at BIFF this year as he tours the world promoting his latest work, but the spotlight will

shine on an impressive collection of acclaimed international award winners. "Call Me By Your Name" star Timothee Chalamet and Indian Oscar winner A.R. Rahman of "Slumdog Millionaire" are expected to either grace the red carpet during the opening gala on Thursday or make an appearance in the days that follow.

"Leaving Las Vegas" director Mike Figgis will head the jury for the festival's main awards, while Japanese auteur Kore-eda Hirokazu will be in town to collect the Asian filmmaker of the year award and to present his latest feature, "The Truth". The Korean star parade will be led by opening night co-host Lee Hanee, fresh from the success of her actioner "Extreme Job", now the second-highest grossing in Korean cinema history. Local films will take pride of place with 20 world premieres in the Korean Cinema Today section alone.

There's a nod to the rising influence of streaming platforms with four Netflix original productions on the program, along with the world premiere of the much-anticipated Malaysia-HBO co-production "The Garden of Evening Mists". Thursday's opening film is acclaimed Kazakh director Yerlan Nurmukhambetov's "The Horse Thieves. Roads of Time", starring 2018 Cannes best actress winner Samal Yesleyamova.

His last appearance at BIFF saw him awarded the prestigious New Currents prize for early career directors with his drama "Walnut Tree" in 2015. BIFF runs from October 3 to 12 and features 303 films from 85 countries.—AFP



In this file photo a woman walks past cinema posters for the Busan International Film Festival (BIFF) at the Busan Cinema Center in Busan. — AFP

## Netflix announces fourth season of hit show 'Stranger Things'

Netflix announced Monday a fourth season of retro sci-fi show "Stranger Things," the site's most successful original production, as it bids to fend off intense competition from other streaming platforms. The video subscription service added that it had entered into a multi-year deal with the hit series' creators, Matt and Ross Duffer, to work on unspecified film and series projects. "Stranger Things," a nostalgic 1980s drama about a gang of suburban adolescents battling supernatural monsters, became an instant hit for Netflix when it was launched in 2016. The third season smashed the platform's global viewing records in July when 40.7 million accounts viewed it in its first four days of airing. The finale to the third season left the door firmly open for a sequel.

Netflix announced the fourth series by tweeting a video along with the tag line "We're not in Hawkins anymore," a reference to the fictional Indiana town where the story began. The tweet appears to suggest that the monsters in the show now live somewhere else, as hinted at the end of season three. The Duffer brothers were virtually unknown when Netflix commissioned their idea about teenagers confronting supernatural creatures and a parallel universe in a smalltown American. "We can't wait to see what The Duffer Brothers have in store when they step outside the world of The Upside Down," said Netflix chief content officer Ted Sarandos, referring to the alternative universe in "Stranger Things." He did not give any further details about their future productions in the press release. Netflix is the market leader in global television and film streaming, with over 140 million paying accounts worldwide. It is accelerating its content production as Apple, Disney, WarnerMedia and NBCUniversal launch their own streaming platforms.—AFP

## Swiss chocolatier Callebaut all-in on cacao

Swiss chocolatier Barry Callebaut on Friday unveiled a new formulation that packs in the parts of the cacao fruit it used to toss away, taking aim at younger generations. As modern consumers seek whole grains, less sugar, more nutrients and less harm to the environment, one of the world's biggest chocolate makers is playing to the trend with products based on a recipe using 100 percent of the cacao fruit, not just the seeds.



This undated and unlocated handout photo released by Barry Callebaut shows a new type of chocolate made entirely from the fruit of a cocoa tree.—AFP

"Millennials and centennials earnestly want to live a happy, healthy life, in symbiosis with the world around them," the Callebaut group said at an event where attendees sampled items from the new "CacaoFruit Experiences" line. "They want food and drinks that are tasty and nutritious for them and also good for the planet and its people." Products in the line were pitched as rich in nutrients while not wasting any of the cacao used to make chocolate, which was long derived from just the beans.

Typically, 70 percent of cacao fruit is discarded as waste while making chocolate, according to Callebaut. CacaoFruit Experiences products promised to pack in the entire fruit, from beans to peels, pulp and juice. "This results in a range of high-quality ingredients that can be used in applications such as juices, smoothies, frozen desserts, bakery and pastry products, and snacks all the way to chocolate," Callebaut said.

"At the same time, they are good for the planet and its people because the entire cacao fruit is utilized." "WholeFruit chocolate" will come in two types, one consisting of 100 percent cacao and another mixing in milk. Callebaut chief executive Antoine de Saint-Affrique said the company was looking forward to many offerings based on its new recipe.

Mondelez International-backed SnackFutures will be the first to introduce CacaoFruit Experiences in consumer products—in smoothie and jerky products initially debuting in Los Angeles shops, according to Callebaut. WholeFruit chocolate made of 100 percent cacao was slated to hit chef and artisan markets early next year. Chocolate has lost some of its appeal in developed markets, where it faces competition from foods perceived as more healthy. The cost of cacao, meanwhile, has put pressure on profits.

Callebaut last year introduced a new "ruby" chocolate, with its client Nestle launching KitKat bars in Japan and South Korea coated in pink chocolate. The pink color is obtained naturally from ruby cocoa, explained Akiko Hara, a manager for Barry Callebaut in Japan. Meanwhile, Nestle in July announced the creation of a chocolate made entirely from cacao beans and pulp, with no refined sugar added. Callebaut is a supplier of chocolate to Nestle, Hershey, Unilever and Mondelez.—AFP

## Tom Cruise meets president in Kiev

Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky welcomed Tom Cruise to Kiev to discuss locations for one of the Hollywood superstar's new film projects, the presidency said yesterday. Zelensky, who was a popular comedian until his shock presidential election win this spring, told the 57-year-old actor about his own experiences in cinema, the press service said. It was not revealed whether the pair discussed the president's current role in a real-life drama: the scandal that has launched impeachment proceedings against US leader Donald Trump.

Photos showed the Ukrainian president beaming as he stood by the casually dressed blockbuster star in an official meeting room on Monday. "During the meeting, Tom Cruise informed Volodymyr Zelensky that he was interested in Ukrainian locations for the shooting of one of his new film projects," the presidency said. Earlier Cruise was spotted on the Soviet-era Kiev subway. Some commentators criticized Zelensky for meeting the actor rather than focusing on his own mission impossible: tackling corruption and ending the war with Russia-backed separatists in the country's east.

Last month, the 41-year-old leader met Hollywood actors Mila Kunis, Ashton Kutcher and Robin Wright at an event in Kiev. Others joked about the real reason for Cruise's visit. "Tom Cruise came here to prepare for the role of Volodymyr Zelensky in a new movie about Trump's impeachment," blogger Petro Terentiev wrote on his Facebook page. Trump is accused of pressuring Zelensky on July 25 to supply dirt on former US vice president Joe Biden, the favorite to represent Democrats against Trump in the 2020 presidential election.—AFP



This handout picture taken and released by the Ukrainian Presidential press-service shows President Volodymyr Zelensky, left, talking with US actor and film producer Tom Cruise, right, during their meeting in Kiev.—AFP

## Kilt helped Tintin come out as more PC comic hero

It's the moment experts say that Tintin stopped being quite so racist, and began his long journey towards what we might now call culturally sensitive "wokeness". A key drawing of the crime-fighting cub reporter from his British adventure, "The Black Island", will go under the hammer in Paris next month. Worth an estimated 300,000 euros (\$326,000), the A3-sized ink drawing from 1938 marks a turning point in the development of the comic book boy hero as a more rounded, self-aware individual.

Having engaged in full-blooded Russophobia in "Tintin in the Land of the Soviets", and piled on the racial stereotypes in subsequent scrapes in the Congo, America and the Middle East, Tintinologists say the story marks a "stylistic and ideological change". And they credit Tintin putting on a skirt—or a Scottish kilt, to be more precise—for this radical transformation. Professor Laurence Grove of the University of Glasgow told AFP that in the story Tintin "goes from looking at other cultures from the outside to taking on other cultures."

## Civilizing mission

"He's not saying, 'I'm going to tell you what to do,' as he did be in the Congo where he wanted to turn the natives into good little Belgians. "This time Tintin is saying, 'I'm going to be like you and by doing that I'm going to help solve the problem,'" said the specialist, the president of the International Bande Dessinee Society, the French name for comics.

Loosely based on Alfred Hitchcock's classic film, "39 Steps", the story has Tintin and his dog Snowy pursuing a gang of counterfeiters across Britain, ending up in the Scottish Highlands where a "ferocious beast" kills anyone who dares to set foot on its island.—AFP



A man rides a bike during a cycling lesson.



Sami (right, in the yellow shirt), one of the teachers of the Let's Ride project, shows different parts of the bicycle to a group of immigrant people, in Merihaka area in Helsinki, Finland.—AFP photos

## Bike riding courses offer Finland's immigrants new freedom

It's a skill you never forget once learnt, as the saying goes: Now immigrants to Finland can receive free cycling lessons to help them better integrate into life in the bike-loving nation. On a sunny September morning a group of around eight students have taken time out from their Finnish lessons to come to an empty car park in Helsinki's Suvilahti district, where they are fitted out with helmets and bikes.

"Many people who come to Finland, mostly women, they don't have this bicycle skill and it's a very important part of Finnish society," says Federico Ferrara of the Finnish Cyclists' Federation, which runs the project. Ferrara insists that learning to ride helps to empower the new arrivals, especially women, many of whom come from North Africa or the Middle East.

"Many of our clients have some kind of taboo with these biking skills, maybe they've fallen down when they were kids and they have this trauma in their head for 20 years, or maybe it's not socially or culturally accepted for them to bike," Ferrara tells AFP. The instructors help some of the students climb onto their bikes, and, as today's group has already had some practice in the saddle, they set off around a course of cones.

Despite some initial wobbles, instructor Sami Viitanen soon decides the group is ready for the next stage, and leads them out for a spin on the roads to get used to riding in traffic. Biking is popular in the Nordic nation, where more than half of people in the capital travel by bike at least once a week, according to authorities. A further 10 percent cycle all year round despite the long,

snowy winters.

But outside the city, learning to ride can be key to living independently. "If they are in a refugee centre, many times they are in the middle of nowhere and the bike can be the only way of commuting," Ferrara says. In the past year-and-a-half, Ferrara and his colleagues have taught 320 beginners to ride. The project is funded by Finland's state lottery and gambling monopoly. Ferrara says that after three hours, 90 percent of clients are able to navigate a car park. "Riding is great, now I can do it," gushes Orhan, who came to Finland from Turkey seven years ago.—AFP