

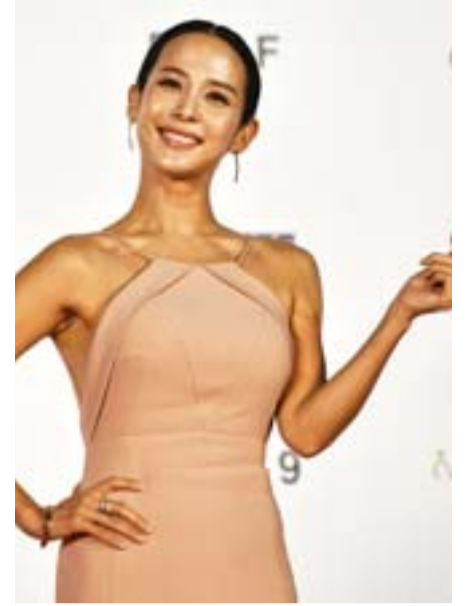
Lifestyle | Film Festival



South Korean actress Lee Hanee, left, and actor Jung Woo-sung pose on the red carpet during the opening ceremony of the Busan International Film Festival (BIFF) at the Busan Cinema Center in Busan. — AFP photos



(Left to right) Jay Jeon, director of the Busan International Film Festival (BIFF), Karel Och, artistic director of the Karlovy Vary International Film Festival, Kazakhstan actress Samal Yesiyamova, British film director Mike Figgis, Chinese-Malaysian actress Sinje Lee and South Korean producer Suh Young-joo, CEO of Finecut Co., pose for photographs during a press conference for the New Currents Jury for BIFF in Busan.



South Korean actress Cho Yeo-jeong

Stars arrive in **Busan** for Asia's largest film festival

The night sky cleared over Busan Thursday after days of rain and wind as the city prepared to host Asia's largest film festival and to welcome a glittering array of stars from across the movie world. Local A-listers Jung Woo-sung and Lee Hanee took to the stage as hosts and welcomed international cinema heavyweights including Philippine screen queen Judy Ann Santos, who arrived in Busan for the world premiere of "Mindanao" with director Brillante Mendoza.

British Oscar nominee Mike Figgis ("Leaving Las Vegas") was in town to head the jury for the festival's main New Currents award, and said he was "excited by the journey ahead of us" over the next 10 days. Host Lee

urged guests—and the tens of thousands of fans who flock to the festival each year—to celebrate the "diversity on offer and discover unknown films".

Other stars gracing this year's festival across its run include Oscar-nominated "Call Me By Your Name" star Timothee Chalamet, Indian Oscar winner A.R. Rahman of "Slumdog Millionaire", and France's Ariane Ascaride, fresh from her best actress award at Venice for "Gloria Mundi". The southern port city was hit hard by Typhoon Mitag overnight Wednesday, with local media reporting a search was continuing for a family of four feared lost under rubble after landslides caused the collapse of a factory, restaurants and other buildings.

The government said nine people were killed across the country as of Thursday afternoon, and that more casualties were expected. Festival organizers had cancelled a traditional public lunch Wednesday-citing safety concerns—and delayed the setting up of outdoor facilities along the city's main Haeundae beach as the typhoon was expected to bring strong wind and heavy rain. But conditions cleared by mid-morning and workers were seen urgently preparing the Busan Cinema Centre for the opening night.

Ahead are 299 films from 85 countries, and VIP guests were joined Thursday by around 2,000 moviegoers for the world premiere of acclaimed Kazakhstani director Yerlan Nurmukhambetov's drama "The Horse Thieves. Roads of Time", the festival opener co-directed by Japan's Lisa Takeba. Nurmukhambetov returns to Busan having previously had his debut feature "Walnut Tree" win the main New Currents award in 2015. He said that success was the "engine" that has run his career ever since.

"I was 40 at the time I won and the acknowledgement of this particular number of people gave me a feeling of deep relief and it brought opportunities," Nurmukhambetov revealed before Thursday's screening.



South Korean actor Jung Hae-in



South Korean actress Kim Gyu-ri

Korean cinema is also celebrating its centenary in 2019 and there were huge cheers to greet the red carpet arrival of some local industry greats Thursday—many who feature in the festival's retrospectives and will meet with fans for Q&A sessions.

Those sharing the spotlight Thursday included director Im Kwon-taek, a veteran of 102 films and named best director at Cannes in 2002 for his sprawling drama

"Chihwaseon". Another is actress Kim Ji-mee, who chucked up around 700 films before calling it quits in the late 1990s. Kim was famed also for a string of romances that saw her dubbed Korea's Elizabeth Taylor by the local media.—AFP

Kore-eda urges 'solidarity' as Japan-South Korea trade war rumbles on

Cannes Palme d'Or-winning Japanese director Hirokazu Kore-eda says he has come to South Korea to show "solidarity" with his fans and fellow filmmakers as governments in Seoul and Tokyo fight out a bitter trade war. "Through showing support for each other we can solve and overcome these political problems," Kore-eda said Saturday as he formally accepted the Asian Filmmaker of the Year of Award from South Korea's Busan International Film Festival (BIFF). "I believe in solidarity."

Although the 10-day BIFF features Japanese films throughout its program, eyebrows were raised at the end of September when it was revealed that the upcoming Tokyo International Film Festival (TIFF) had not selected any

Korean productions for its main award. The trade war between the two countries was ignited after a South Korean court ordered that Japan pay compensation to the relatives of those affected by its colonization of the Korean peninsula from 1910 to 1945.

Japan refused to acknowledge the ruling and first placed trade restrictions on tech exports to South Korea before downgrading the country's trading status. South Koreans have since mounted a widespread boycott of Japanese goods, including beer, cosmetic products and cars, among others. Kore-eda pointed to BIFF's own history with problematic politics as an "inspiration" to filmmakers and to the world.

The Korean festival had come under intense governmental pressure in 2014 when it screened a controversial documentary about the Sewol ferry disaster that claimed the lives of more than 300 people, many of them children. The documentary highlighted what it saw as misconduct by the then-government of Park Geun-hye. The festival was told to withdraw the film but kept it on the programme and then faced budget cuts and criminal charges filed against senior management. The matter was only really resolved with the arrival of the government of Moon Jae-in in 2017.—AFP



This handout photo shows Japanese director Hirokazu Kore-eda during a ceremony for the Asian Filmmaker of the Year Award by BIFF in Busan. — AFP

Ferry disaster, politics and cinema intermingle at BIFF

A new film about the Sewol ferry sinking, a disaster that killed more than 300 people—most of them children, will premiere at Asia's biggest film festival, five years after director Lee Sang-ho caused controversy with his first documentary on the topic. "Diving Bell", which screened at the 2014 Busan International Film Festival (BIFF), criticized then leader Park Geun-hye's administration on its handling of the sinking. In response, angry officials cut BIFF's \$1.3 million funding by 50 percent, with Busan's mayor at the time criticizing the movie as "too political" for such an event.

The city's action echoed the national government's approach—more than 10,000 artists who criticized Park or simply expressed support for the Sewol victims' families were blacklisted. Now, Lee's new film, "President's 7 Hours", revisits the day the Sewol sank and tries to clarify the mystery surrounding Park's seven-hour absence after news of the tragedy broke. There was wild media speculation on what she was doing, but investigators concluded she was at her residence for the first few critical hours after the disaster.

Park, who was later impeached and is currently serving a 25 year jail term for bribery, extortion, abuse of power and other charges, has never given a clear reason for her lack of public response as the tragedy unfolded. Tickets for "President's 7 Hours" BIFF screenings sold out in just 10 minutes, according to the movie's producers. "I hope the fire (for justice) spreads to all corners of the country for BIFF just like it did with 'Diving Bell' five years ago," Lee said. The Sewol disaster remains a national trauma, having exposed a bitter political divide where families of the victims—mostly from a working class suburb—were accused by right wing groups of being North Korea sympathizers because they criticized the conservative politicians in power.

Truth never sinks

The Sewol's captain Lee Joon-seok—one of the first people to leave the sinking ship, abandoning hundreds of children trapped inside—was sentenced to life in prison for negligence and murder. Other crew members were jailed for terms ranging from 18 months to 12 years. But families of the victims are demanding those in government at the time should be held to account, and have called for fresh investigations into key figures of the Park administration, including Hwang Kyo-ahn, who was justice minister and is now leader of the main opposition Liberty Korea Party.

Lee, who is also a journalist, has demanded all those culpable be brought to justice, accusing prosecutors of selective law enforcement. He pointed to the speed with which South Korean justice minister Cho Kuk's home was raided in a corruption probe involving his daughter's admission to a medical school, compared to the investigations into the role of key political figures in the Sewol incident.—AFP

Thai cave film makes world premiere at Busan festival

The first movie centered around the cave rescue of 12 Thai schoolboy footballers and their coach made its world premiere on Saturday and there was one man in the audience for whom the experience proved as thrilling as it was nerve-shredding. "You can't help but relive the tension and the fear we were feeling, but also there was that sense of excitement and relief when it was all over," rescuer Jim Wamy told AFP.

The Ireland-based Belgian was among the crew of international cave rescue divers who plucked the "Wild Boars" and their coach from the Tham Luang Nang Non

caves last year and he has travelled to the 24th Busan International Film Festival for the world premiere of the fittingly titled "The Cave". Wamy plays himself in the film and said the experience—his first in film—had been therapeutic.

"For me it's not about making a profit it's been about inspiring other people to show that great things can be achieved, against the odds," said Wamy. "Physically, I was back at work on Tuesday after I returned on Sunday. But it took six months to come to terms with it and I worked through a lot of it during filming too."

Directed by Irish-Thai filmmaker Tom Waller, the film is the first in what is expected to be a rollout of big- and small-screen treatments of the story that gripped the world for the 18 days the group was trapped underground. Wamy had only just gone back to Ireland, to his partner and his day job as an electrician, when the calls started coming from filmmakers, TV producers and journalists. "I'd returned home after completing the rescue and the pressure suddenly changed," he said. "It was almost like more pressure than the actual event. But it's worked out OK in the end."

Waller's film puts its focus more on the rescue effort than on the kids and the teacher who were trapped—more by necessity than design after those rescued signed deals tying them to a Netflix series in the works. Reports say they were paid around \$100,000 each and there is also a National Geographic documentary in the works from the team behind the Oscar-winning film Free Solo. "There was a lot of detail of the rescue that the world hadn't really been told about, like the sedation of the kids and the background to the rescuers," said Waller.

"Once I got in touch with Jim and met him all this started to be revealed and I saw how much more there was to the story that hadn't been told. Sure there was the rescue, but how? I wanted to tell the story of the people who weren't on YouTube." That was impossible in Wamy's case because once he came to Thailand he spent much of the time in the cave, under water. He'd come to cave rescue diving after being drawn to the "technicalities of it all." —AFP



This undated handout photo obtained from the Busan International Film Festival (BIFF) in Busan shows a scene from 'The Cave,' the first big-screen retelling of the Thai rescue operation. — AFP