

INTERNATIONAL NEWS BRIEFS

PACIFIC OVERTURES

Notes From the Pacific Rim *by Francesca Dinglasan*

LEAD STORY: THAI CHAIN SETS DATE FOR IPO FLOAT

BANGKOK—One of Thailand's largest theatrical circuits recently unfurled 60 million shares in an initial public offering. EGV Entertainment's mid-June float was launched in the hope of raising nearly 300 million baht (US\$7.1 million). The proceeds have been earmarked for repayment of company debt, which is estimated to run around 600 million baht (US\$14 million). In addition to the IPO, EGV had been planning to go public on the Stock Exchange of Thailand in late June. The cinema operator currently comprises 85 screens at 10 sites throughout the territory, with plans to expand to 100 screens by the end of this year.

MUMBAI MOVIEHOUSE SLATED FOR RENOVATION

MUMBAI—Adlabs' Manmohan Shetty recently confirmed his interest in India's historic Metro moviehouse by investing in the cinema, according to local reporters. The 76-year-old venue is expected to be operated as a joint venture between Adlabs and the theatre's current owners Atul and Govind Gupta, with immediate plans for the site to involve an expansion of the single-screener into a modern four-plex. As a protected landmark under the region's Heritage Committee of the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, the Metro's revamp is subject to certain restrictions, including a mandate that the venue maintain its current seat count of 1,490.

MILITARY BASE CINEMA GETS A FACELIFT

OKINAWA—American military men and women stationed at Camp Foster in Japan were able once again to enjoy the very Yankee pastime of watching movies at a nearby cinema, following the relaunch of the Foster Theatre. After months of undergoing renovation, updated features now available are digital sound, an improved concessions area and rocking-style seats. Service-members and their families had the choice of watching "Piglet's Big Movie," "Chicago" or "The Matrix Reloaded" during the moviehouse's reopening festivities.

CHINESE CINEMAS REOPEN AFTER SARS SCARE

BEIJING—Moviehouses throughout the Chinese capital recently reopened for business, after nearly two months of closure related to the outbreak of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) in the region. In an attempt to curb the spread of the virus, public gathering places, including cinemas and schools, had been closed in several of China's major metropolitan areas for several weeks. While a small number of SARS-related deaths in the territory has been announced, there had been no reports of any new cases at the time of the government's decision to reopen Beijing theatres. Among the U.S. productions likely to benefit from the news are "Daredevil," "My Big Fat Greek Wedding" and "The Matrix Reloaded," which were all to be released in the territory during the weeks following the lifted ban on cinema attendance.

VILLAGE SKY CITY LIGHTS UP AUCKLAND

AUCKLAND—After much anticipation, the new Village Sky City cinema complex launched in the Kiwi market of Auckland to great fanfare. For the multiplex's grand opening ceremonies, locals were invited to the local premier screening of the Jim Carrey star-

rer "Bruce Almighty" for NZ\$65 (US\$12), with proceeds from the evening event earmarked for charity. In addition to various local celebrities, New Zealand's prime minister was on hand for the special function.

LOCAL OZ RESIDENTS SAVE CLASSIC THEATRE

SYDNEY—The local government for the Aussie state of New South Wales recently granted an interim heritage order for the Athenium Theatre, a historic venue located in the town of Junee. The 75-year-old site had been scheduled tentatively for demolition until a group of local residents roused up support to keep the building protected from the wrecking ball. Junee's town council, which had ordered the Athenium's razing, originally intended to build a new medical center on the site. The group protesting the demolition argues, however, that there are a number of other suitable locations for the construction of the center.

BLAZE IGNITES IN BANGALORE THEATRE

BANGALORE—Four patrons are reported to have been injured when a small blaze broke out in a moviehouse in the Indian city of Bangalore. The fire, which took place during a crowded evening showing, was believed to have originated from debris located behind the screen. An estimated 500 moviegoers were at the cinema during the incident, with the more serious injuries caused during the crowd's stampede to vacate the building. The fire was put out immediately, and no serious damage was caused to the site.

MULTIPLEX DEVELOPMENT OK'D FOR AUSTRALIAN TOWN

SYDNEY—By a seven-three vote, local government officials have approved plans for a cineplex development in the community of Inveresk. The theatrical build is just the latest in a series of projects that have been greenlit for the town, with previous proposals including a hotel, a restaurant and a large-format theatre. The price tag for the multiplex site is expected to come in at a final tally of AU\$4 million (US\$2.6 million).

SEOUL SKYSCRAPER TO INCLUDE SCREENS

SEOUL—South Korea will be home to the world's tallest building come 2008, when the grand opening of the 130-story International Business Center is slated to take place. Among the major staples to be housed in the 580-meter-high building include a modern movie theatre, a 560-room hotel and an airport terminal. Upon its launch, the new skyscraper will surpass Shanghai's 492-meter-high World Financial Centre as the tallest manmade creation.

PACIFIC RIMSHOTS

South Korean film conglomerate **Plenus Entertainment** has revealed that it will merge with online game outfit NetMarble. The move is considered a coup for Plenus, considering that earlier this year local company Locus Holdings had been planning to sell its sizable stake in the corporation to Plenus rival CJ Entertainment.... Taiwan's legislative body has toughened penalties for film piracy, with counterfeiters now facing as much as \$230,000 in fines and up to seven years in prison.