

Kashi film fest pitches UP as filmmaking hub

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VARANASI: The first edition of the Kashi Film Festival, a joint initiative of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting and the Government of Uttar Pradesh, kicked off in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's parliamentary constituency on Monday.

The three-day film festival, along with the proposed Film City project in Noida, Gorakhpur Lok Sabha MP Ravi Kishan said, will serve as an effective tool to prevent local talent from venturing outside of Uttar Pradesh in search of opportunities in the creative fields.



Setting the tone for the UP polls, only a few months away now, Kishan also defended the timing of the festival's launch.

"Opposition says this was done with elections in mind. I say it reflects their own thinking. As far as we are concerned, we inaugurate 20 projects a day because that is the amount of work we have done," Kishan said.

Kishan also announced a 'Natya Kumbh', a gathering of 1800 theatre artists in Gorakhpur early next year, where he said they will celebrate lesser known heroes of Indian history under the theme of 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' in the 75th year of Indian independence.

State tourism, culture and charitable affairs minister and local legislator Neelkanth Tiwari also used the festival stage to assert that Prime Minister Modi has set India on the path to achieving 'Ram Rajya' as envisioned by Mahatma Gandhi, whether it is through the revamped Kashi Vishwanath corridor, the repeal of Article 370, or setting Muslim women "free" from the shackles of triple talaq.

"Kashi is offering solutions to the problems of the world. When the PM launched the Kashi Vishwanath corridor, the world was watching. One problem festering for over 500 years was the Ayodhya one, the PM resolved that too," Tiwari said.

Lauding UP government and Film Bandhu for its effective promotion of UP as a go-to destination for film shooting, Union I&B secretary Apurva Chandra said the idea of hosting the Kashi Film Festival was conceived at the International Film Festival of India at Goa in November, keeping in mind UP's rich contribution to the world of cinema.

Veteran film actor Anupam Kher said the cinema was for the world and that creative talent should not limit themselves to geographies. He said the Kashi film festival will provide a platform to local talent from which to travel the world.

Additional chief secretary Navneet Sehgal also said an investor's summit hosted by the UP government in Mumbai had suggested that nearly 60% people working in the Bollywood film industry in various capacities were from UP. "This festival is an opportunity to promote local traditions and cultures in continuation of the Prime Minister's efforts to improve Varanasi," he said.

The inaugural festival also saw performances by actor Manoj Joshi, singer Kailash Kher and stand-up comedian Raju Srivastava. The National Film Archives of India also showcased posters of 60 iconic Indian films – ranging from Satyajit Ray's *Joi Baba Felunath* to *Ram Teri Ganga Mailli* – shot in Varanasi.

Many other celebrities like filmmaker Rahul Mittra, president of Indian Film & Television Directors Association Ashoke Pandit, directors Satish Kaushik & Madhur Bhandarkar will be seen in action during the next two days. While Anupam and Pandit will participate in a panel discussion on Varanasi's cultural heritage, award-winning filmmaker Mittra will speak on the importance of Uttar Pradesh as a centre for film production, and the potential for regional cinema on the second day. This would be followed by performances of singer Kailash Kher and Hema Malini among others.

Union I&B minister Anurag Thakur will preside over the function on the second day.