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Bollywood celebrity Shah Rukh Khan to star in feature film shot in early 2010 in Miami

By Zachary S. Fagenson

One of Bollywood's biggest stars is slated to spend about a month in Miami shooting a film that could be seen by up to half a billion people around the globe.

Executive Producer Prashant Shah, founder, president and CEO of New Jersey-based Bollywood Hollywood Productions, said besides entertaining global audiences, his film geared for India may also draw global investors to Miami.

An "estimated \$50 million was dropped into the city after they saw our film," he said of "Dostana," a 2008 Bollywood film he produced in Miami. "I know at least 50 Indian families from Southeast Asia who, after they saw the film, bought homes in Miami."

This latest project, he argued, will spur even more investment in the area thanks to star Shah Rukh Khan.

Mr. Shah said filming on "Ra.One" is expected to begin in March and last about 30 days. It's also expected to generate about 1,500 additional jobs.

It's a superhero film, much like "Superman" or "Spiderman," but instead of being set in a darker, grittier Gotham City-like setting, the producers chose the sun and sand of Miami for the backdrop.

Although an unfamiliar face in Miami, Shah Rukh Khan is one of the preeminent global celebrities.

"Most people don't know who he is, but he's as big as Brad Pitt and George Clooney rolled together," said Robert Parente, director of the City of Miami Mayor's Office of Film and Cultural Affairs.

Mr. Khan has starred in 67 films and 10 television shows and produced 14 feature films. He owns a video effects shop in India and in 2008 was named one of the 50 most influential people in the world by Newsweek magazine.

Despite the star power coming with this film, producers chose Miami even though they aren't receiving any film incentive money.

Although the state more than doubled its film incentive fund from \$5 million to \$10.8 million this year, the money was already spoken for by the time the production team on this film chose its location.

While another US location, such as Southern California, could have provided a similar backdrop, Mr. Shah said it was his experience here in 2008 shooting "Dostana" that drew him back.

And if he wanted to pursue incentives, he could have done so easily.

The German government used incentives to cover 50% of costs for the filming of "Don 2," an action thriller starring Mr. Khan, scheduled to begin shooting in September next year, he said.

That enthusiasm for Miami, some say, could bode well for the future of the film industry here. Industry advocates have been fighting for a restoration and overhaul of the state's film incentive

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program since the legislature slashed it from \$25 million to \$5 million in 2007.

While the team will be shooting in locations around the city, they'll be based at the Doubletree Grand in downtown Miami.

And even though Mr. Shah said the project's budget is still being worked out, Mr. Parente of the city said he expected the company to spend between "\$10 million and \$15 million locally."

The choice to shoot Bollywood in Miami may not be a fluke, either.

Another Bollywood film, "Kites," is being edited by Miami Beach-native Brett Ratner. Mr. Ratner directed the "Rush Hour" series of films as well as the Fox series "Prison Break."

And if Miami were to become one of Bollywood's production hubs, it would have a significant financial upside.

The Indian film community that produces the multi-hour singing-and-dancing spectacles churns out about 900 of them annually, according to Mr. Shah.

Hollywood, he added, only produces about 260 films a year.

While many Bollywood films don't go beyond Indian theaters, Mr. Shah said about 400 open worldwide every year and two new Bollywood films open in North American theaters every weekend.

And even if those films don't break box-office records, he said, the worst a Bollywood production does in revenue in North American theaters is \$1 million, and the average is \$3 million to \$8 million.

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