

LOOKING BACK

FIRST INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S FILM FESTIVAL

Cine Central, Calcutta organized the **First International Children's Film Festival** from **15th to 31st December, 1979** in celebration of the International Year of Child. The venue was Calcutta Maidan opposite to Birla Planetarium. This was not mere film festival but a composite Children's fair.

The programme of the festival was divided into four parts—(a) Film-shows (b) Cultural Functions, (c) Competitions and (d) Exhibitions. There were two auditoriums inside the festival arena namely **Pather Panchali Mancha** and **Charlie Chaplin Mancha**.

The festival-cum-fair was inaugurated by Shri Buddhadeb Bhattacharya, Minister-in-Charge of the Deptt. of Information and Cultural Affairs, Govt. of West Bengal. Shri Kalpataru Sengupta our President and noted journalist presided over the function. Variety entertainment programmes included Recitations, Dance Dramas, Musical Soiree, Magic and Puppet Show, Drama etc. Besides, a 'Sit-and-Draw-Art' Contest was arranged. A philatelic competition for child collectors was also held where the P& T Department released one Special Cover in commemoration of the festival with Special Cancellation.

UNICEF organized a big exhibition inside the festival-arena depicting child-life in our country. Department of Information and Cultural Affairs, Govt. of West Bengal opened a big pavilion and Department of Youth Services put up two exhibitions—one on mountaineering and the other on science and civilization. A miniature mountain was erected near the pavilion for mock rock climbing. Demonstrations were given to a large number of children by the members of leading organizations. Department of Forests, Animal Husbandry & Tribal Welfare, Government of West Bengal, CMDA, Khadi Board and CADC also took pavilions for projecting their activities. The United Industrial Bank also opened a children's Bank inside the festival-arena.

All-out efforts were made to reach those children who were not able to come all the way to Maidan. We organized shows in different slums in Calcutta and in suburbs. For this we got financial assistance from the Department of Social Welfare, Government of West Bengal.

The entire programme got tremendous response among vast number of children. More than 2 lakhs children and their accompanying guardians attended the festival on different days. Most notable feature was that the entire programme was free.

SECOND INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S FILM FESTIVAL & FAIR

The 2nd INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S FILM FESTIVAL & FAIR was held in Calcutta Maidan from February 28 to March 16, 1981. Shri Prasanta Sur, Minister for Local Govt. and Urban Development, Government of West Bengal inaugurated the festival on February 28 at Calcutta Maidan. Shri Sailo Chakraborty was present as the Guest-in-Chief. Shri Kalpataru Sen Gupta our President presided over the function.

Films from more than 35 countries were shown in two auditoriums namely **Googa Baga Mancha** and **Walt Disney Mancha** daily in the evening. Field demonstrations, Bratachari and Folk Dances were held in the afternoon and the most interesting part of the festival was variety entertainment programmes by more than 40 leading children's organizations in the exclusive auditorium **Ha-Ja-Ba-Ra-La Mancha**.

Seven contests - Quiz, Debate, Sit-and-Write, Sit-and-Draw, Recitation, Vocal Music and Philatelic Collection were organized in association with leading Business Houses. More than 5,000 children took part in different competition.

Exhibition on child life in different countries, wild life, sports and games, education, science and civilization attracted a large number of children in Calcutta and its suburbs. UNICEF organized an exhibition for the first time in India focusing the needs of disabled children.

One day of the festival was dedicated to the disabled children and special functions was organized on 8th March to popularize the five principal objectives of International Year of Disabled Persons set out in the UN Resolution. **Smt. Nirupama Chatterjee, Minister of State for Social Welfare** was Guest-in-Chief and **Shri Abdul Bari Minister of State for Primary and Secondary Education** presided over the function.

THIRD INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S FILM FESTIVAL & FAIR

The **Third International Children's Film Festival and Fair** was held at Calcutta Maidan opposite Birla Planetarium from **February 9 to 23, 1982**. The festival was held on a much wider scale and comprised of (i) Film Shows, (ii) Cultural functions, (iii) Competition and (iv) Exhibitions.

Shri Jyoti Basu, Chief Minister of West Bengal inaugurated the festival on Tuesday February 9, 1982. **Shri Jatin Chakraborty, Minister-in-Charge of the Departments of Public Works and Housing, Govt. of West Bengal** was the Guest-in-Chief. **Shri Buddhadev Bhattacharya, Minister-in-Charge of the Department of Information and Cultural Affairs, Govt. of West Bengal** was present as special guest. Noted writer, **Swapanburo (Shri Akhil Neogy)** presided over the function. A colourful children's parade, synchronizing with the inauguration of the festival, was organized.

An Exhibition depicting child-life in different countries, wild life, tourism, education, science, civilization etc. was held in the festival-arena. The Education Department of the State Govt., organized a very interesting Science Exhibition in collaboration with the Birla Industrial and Technological Museum. Besides CMDA, Calcutta Improvement Trust, Calcutta Corporation, Tourism Department, Government of West Bengal and West Bengal Housing Board also put up their pavilions to project their activities.

Six contests were organized for children—(i) Quiz, (ii) Debate, (iii) Sit-and-Draw, (iv) Sit-and-Write, (v) Philatelic Collection and (vi) Recitation. A Special Cover was released on February 11 in commemoration of the festival. The P&T Department, Government of India provided Special Cancellation on the occasion.

Like in the past the festival-films were taken to the different slums in Calcutta and its suburbs. The festival got overwhelming response from the children and their parents. Unfortunately, we could not gather enough sponsors and financial help to continue this unique programme exclusively for the children.

THE LONG GAP AND AFTER

The financial crunch coupled with some other factors compelled us to discontinue the **Children's Film Festival and Fair**. But there was persistent demand from our members and well-wishers to revive the children's film programme.

So, a new beginning was made in a modest way—the **4th International Children's Film Festival** was held from 15th to 21st August 1999 at Sarala Roy Memorial Hall. Though it could not be made an annual event—we continue to hold children's film programmes from time to time. In the year 2002-03 several screenings of children's film were made under the banner of Amitabha Bramachary Memorial Children's Film Foundation. Such sporadic shows could not serve the very purpose of giving the children the opportunity of viewing world cinema.

Then came the **5th International Children's Film Festival** that was held from 23rd to 27th May 2005 at Purbashree Auditorium, Salt Lake City, Kolkata. The festival held in collaboration with Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre was truly international with 16 films from 10 countries. **Shri Kanti Biswas Minister for Primary & Secondary Education, Govt. of West Bengal inaugurated the festival and Dr. Abirlal Mukherjee our Vice-President presided over.** The festival was hugely successful which was evident by the large gatherings of children in all the shows.

The encouraging response and popular demand embolden us to make the next festival a little bigger and better. The **6th International Film Festival** was organized in collaboration with NANDAN (West Bengal Film Centre) and Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre, Govt. of India. Children being focal point we arranged the festival in two locations—Nandan and Purbashree and timed the festival with summer vacation (from 22nd to 31st May, 2006) in which over 30 films from 12 countries were screened. **Shri Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharya, Mayor, Kolkata Municipal Corporation inaugurated the festival where eminent writer Shri Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay was present as Guest-in-Chief.**

The two successive successful festivals encouraged us to redeem our pledge to make the Children's Film Festival an annual event. The 7th edition of the festival became bigger and colourful. Besides Nandan & Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre, the UNICEF also gave a helping hand. **Smt. Renuka Chowdhury, Honb'le Minister of State (Independent Charge), Department of Women & Child Development, Govt. of India inaugurated the festival on 14th May, 2007 and Dr. Pratap Chandra Chunder, Former Union Minister of Education graced the occasion as Guest-in-Chief, Justice Shyamal Kumar Sen our President presided over the function. The festival continued upto 19th May, 2007.**

The ten-day festival, which had over 40 films from 16 countries, gave the children an opportunity to peep into the world cinema. The festival was not confined to city only, with the assistance of local bodies the festival films were taken to suburbs. The response from every one was indeed encouraging. It inspired us to make yet another edition of the programme.

THE EIGHTH INTERNATIONAL CHILDREN'S FILM FESTIVAL

There was a gala inaugural programme on 14th May 2008 at 6.30 p.m. in Nandan-I. Eminent Film Director Sri Tarun Majumdar while inaugurating the festival recounted the problems and hardship for making film for the children. He hoped that such film festival would help to create an environment for producing children's film. Ms. Lori Calvo, State representative of UNICEF in West Bengal said that the healthy cultural environment was a must for the all round development of the child, and film being a powerful medium, the festival would go a long way to educate as well as entertain the children. Sri Nilanjan Chattopadhyay, Chief Executive Officer, Nandan, stressed the need for making and as well as screening children's film in a regular way. Hon'ble Justice Sri Shyamal Kumar Sen, Chairperson, West Bengal Human Rights Commission and President, Cine Central, Calcutta, urged the parents to guide the children to select what was good for them.

On the occasion of the festival, UNICEF West Bengal office organized a photo exhibition at the foyer of Nandan where photographs on the developmental activities of UNICEF in this state were highlighted.

The festival was truly an international one. During this 10-day festival about 45 films from the following countries—Czech Republic, Cuba, Netherlands, Iran, France, Israel, Germany, India, USA, Russia, Japan, China, Croatia, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh were shown. The festival films were screened in Nandan, Purbasree (Eastern Zonal Cultural Centre), Labour Welfare Centre, Manicktala, Rabindra Bhawan, Rishra and other places. It is estimated that over 60 thousand children have participated in this festival, which was absolutely free.

The festival became more colourful with two more inaugural programmes on consecutive days. On 17th May, 2008 the Rishra Municipality held inaugural programme at Rabindra Bhawan, Rishra. Sri Bikash Ranjan Chattacharya, Mayor of Kolkata Municipal Corporation, inaugurated the festival where Sri Santashree Chatterjee MP was present as Guest-in-Chief. Sri Dilip Sarkar, Rishra Municipality, Sri Santi Ranjan Das, Vice-Chairman, and Sri Sadhan Chakraborty, General Secretary, Cine Central, Calcutta were also present. There was also a inaugural function on 1st May 08 at Labour Welfare Centre, Munniktala. Sri Prasanta Chatterjee, MP and former Mayor of Calcutta Corporation inaugurated the festival. Sri Arup Chanda, Secretary, Beliaghata Education Aid Centre, and Sri Sadhan Chakraborty also spoke on the occasion.