

NEWS & VIEWS

THE HIDDEN PRICE OF HACKING



MOHAMMED ROUDA

The plot of James Bond's "Tomorrow Never Dies", written by Bruce Feirstein and directed by the absent but not forgotten Roger Spottiswoode in 1997, is about a media mogul's (played by Jonathan Pryce) plans to start WWII for his own benefit. He has it all figured out: if he can arrange for an accident between the British sea force and that of China that would lead to a war between the two giant powers, he could fulfill his dreams of becoming a news provider for the whole world. He plans the details and attempts to execute the operation, in the hope of obtaining global media coverage. But James Bond, who has an excellent track record in saving the world from weird maniacs like this, is there to stop him.

The News of the World scandal that took place all of last month wasn't going to lead to the end of the world, but did involve the hacking of innocent victims in order to sell more papers. Selling 1,800,000 copies of this Sunday paper was not enough. Whether it was ambition or greed, the largest UK newspaper, in terms of sales, was lead to believe that such an act was worth the risk – well, it was not.

The victims of this plot, which contains elements of conspiracy, were many. There were the victims of the July 7 terrorist attack on London's buses and underground trains. The relatives of soldiers who died in Iraq and Afghanistan, and a number of individual cases, such as the relatives of the twins who were murdered in Soham, Cambridgeshire, in 2002 and

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the family of Milly Dowler, the school girl who was murdered after being abducted at the age 13, also in 2002. The family of Ms. Dowler were told by the police that they believed their daughter was still alive, prolonging their suffering. The newspaper is accused of sending payments to some co-operating officers and of using this news to sell more copies.

When the hacking scandal first came to light, the impact was serious, but it didn't stop there. It led to the closure of the newspaper on Sunday, 10 July, then the arrival of media mogul Rupert Murdoch to oversee the explosive events and take the reins from his son James, who is said to have favoured fighting it off. The resignation of a number of Murdoch's most 'trusted' team members came next, among them Rebecca Brooks, chief editor of the doomed newspaper. Resignations of other heads, both inside and outside Murdoch's empire, followed.

With the events still unraveling as this article goes to print, and the end nowhere in sight, the overall impact on both Murdoch's giant empire and the future of media ethics in Britain (and possibly abroad) is also taking sharp turns as the investigations are carried out. But the fact is, what has happened, which was certainly neither legal nor pleasant for all parties involved, leaves us considering whether government supervision of media is needed as a guarantee that this sort of thing does not happen again.

Some UK politicians are expressing that this is exactly what is needed, including watching over the shoulders of publications and interfering with what's being published. If this is not seizing the right of expression, I don't know what is. It reminds me of regimes in other parts of the world, including Arab countries, where authorities keep an eye on what you write, hear, watch and say. While no one thinks the same thing would be applied in the West – thanks to being built on freedom of speech and self expression – one thing could lead, in the future, to another, bringing us closer to George Orwell's "1984" state or Francoise Truffault's "Fahrenheit 451". It's one thing to fight corruption and another thing altogether to call for dictation.

INDIAN SUMMER AT LOCARNO

Gautaman Bhaskaran: It will be an Indian summer on the Swiss Alps as the Locarno International Film Festival will have a special focus on Indian cinema during its 64th edition to run from August 3 to 13.

The Festival, which began in 1946, will screen Indian classics in its Open Door Programme. A selection of classics that date back to 1929 and recent productions of 2010, will include films from India's master moviemakers, such as Satyajit Ray, Ritwick Ghatak, Girish Kasaravalli, Adoor Gopalakrishnan and Shyam Benegal.

Ray's "Charulata" (The Lonely Wife), "Mahanagar" (The Big City), "Nayak" (The Hero) and "Mahapurush" (The Saint) among others will be some of the attractions of the program. Ray holds a special place in Europe as his first work "Pather Panchali" was screened at the 1956 Cannes Film Festival which placed India firmly on the world cinema map.

The unconventional director Ghatak's 1960 film "Megha Dhaka Tara" (The Cloud-Clapped Star) contrasting against the largely song-and-dance Indian melodramas, examines the trials and tribulations of a beautiful young refugee woman from Bangladesh. Kasaravalli's "Kanasembo Kudureyaneri" (Riding the Stallion of a Dream), a film narrating the dreams and despair of an impoverished gravedigger and his wife in an Indian village, will be another high point.

Also a brilliant pillar of the New Indian Cinema, Gopalakrishnan will show his film "Nizhalkuthu" (The Shadow Kill). One of his latest films is a poignant story of a hangman in Kerala. Guilt ridden and grieving at having to obey the command of his king to execute whom he perceives as innocent, the hangman collapses before he can pull the lever.

Some of the other Indian films to screen are Franz Osten's 1929 "Prapancha Pash" (A Throw of Dice), Chetan Anand's "Neecha Nagar" (Lowly City), Raj Kapoor's "Aag", Guru Dutt's "Pyaasa" (The Thirsty One), Aparna Sen's "Mr and Mrs Iyer", Umesh Kulkarni's "Valu" (The Wild Bull) and Vikramaditya Motwane's "Udaan" (The Flight).

Another segment of the Indian summer will be a roundtable conference titled "Lessons from Bollywood" where actor Kabir Bedi, Gopalakrishnan, Gargi Sen (documentary filmmaker) and others will explore the relationship between Bollywood and India's independent cinema.



Parveen Dusanj and Kabir Bedi