

Reliance Big Entertainment to spend \$1 bn on films

Reliance BIG Entertainment, the media and entertainment arm of the \$75 billion Reliance Anil Dhirubhai Ambani group, Friday announced that it would spend \$1 billion on the Indian film and entertainment business over the next 12-15 months.

This is by far the biggest commitment made by an Indian entertainment company for show business.

Amid the glitter and glamour at the 61st edition of the Cannes Film Festival at the French Riviera, Reliance BIG Entertainment also revealed that 69 films in nine languages would be ready for distribution over the next 18 months. Over a dozen films will be released this year.

'India is uniquely positioned in the global economic order. We believe this is the right time to make this commitment of \$1 billion for the film entertainment business,' said Amit Khanna, chairman of Reliance Entertainment.

'We believe we are creating 21st century's truly integrated media and entertainment company. Our \$1 billion spend is bigger than the cumulative investments of all other Indian players put together in this space. We will continue our aggressive expansion plans in film exhibition and leverage synergies to our growing production and distribution pipeline.'

The Indian entertainment business is a \$4 billion industry, growing at 18 percent annually.

Reliance Big Entertainment will be working with the best of Indian directors including Vidhu Vinod Chopra, Farhan Akhtar, Shyam Benegal, Shaji Karun, Sudhir Mishra, Rituparno Ghosh, M.S. Sathyu, Madhur Bhandarkar, Buddhadev Dasgupta, Girish Kasravalli and Amol Palekar.

'We have one of the best creatively differentiated slate of movies,' said Rajesh Sawhney, president of Reliance Entertainment.

'Our biggest challenge is to get our content and distribution to work in harmony. We believe digital and home entertainment will be unique for our growth.'

Reliance Big Entertainment has appointed senior ad man and well known lyricist Prasoon Johsi as its advisor to evaluate scripts and products.

'People love good cinema and hate bad cinema. Our whole idea is to create good cinema from Reliance,' said Joshi. He will evaluate scripts received by Reliance from independent filmmakers.

Ace filmmaker Vinod Chopra is excited to have formed a production partnership with BIG Entertainment.

'This alliance will ensure that our films will reach every corner of the world and take Indian cinema to the next level,' Chopra said.

The first of the feature films under this deal is a mainstream English language film 'Broken Horses' directed by Chopra. The second film is based on a classic Indian tale, to be directed by Ram Madhvani.

Reliance also announced a strategic tie up with Excel Entertainment, run by Ritesh Sidhwani and Farhan Akthar.

The six films covered under this alliance include Abhishek Kapoor's 'Rock On', Zoya Akhthar's 'Lucky by Chance', Farhan's 'Voice of the Sky' and 'Don II', Abhinay Deo's '7 Minutes' (working title) and Reema Kagti's 'Accident Spot'.

'It is a noteworthy collaboration,' said Sidhwani.

Reliance Big Entertainment business arms include Big Motion Pictures, Adlabs Films, Big ND Studios, Big Animation, Big Music and Big Entertainment.

The company has also forayed into Big Broadcasting, Big 92.7 FM and Big DTH and IPTV. Its new media companies include Zapak (India's number one online gaming portal), Big Adda (social networking site), Jump Games (mobile games) and Big Flix (movie rental and download service).

Reliance Big Entertainment is set to open offices in Southeast Asia, the Middle East and Australia and also in major cities in India.

The Reliance group, which also has 160 operating screens in India, is likely to increase the number to 400 screens by end-2009.

Early this year, the group made its foray into the US film exhibition market with agreements to operate 250 screens covering 28 cities in the key markets in the east, mid west and west coast.

The company has also entered into an agreement to acquire controlling stake in Lotus Five Star Cinemas and operate 51 screen exhibition chains in Malaysia.

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