

Director Kusturica named advisor to Bosnia's Serb president

Acclaimed Serbian filmmaker Emir Kusturica has been appointed an advisor to Bosnia's nationalist Serb President Milorad Dodik, according to the presidency. The two men are known to be close friends, with 64-year-old Kusturica, a two-time Palme d'Or winner, describing Dodik as "nothing but the best" in an interview last year with local media. The announcement, posted on the presidency's website, did not specify what Kusturica's portfolio would be. Dodik, who has been sanctioned by the US, was elected to Bosnia's three-man presidency last October, seeding fears about the future of the fragile and divided country.

Though he began his political career as an ally of the

West, Dodik later rebranded as a firebrand nationalist. In recent years he inflamed Western powers by referring to post-war Bosnia as a "failed country" and threatening to hold a referendum on the secession of the Serb-dominated region he has run for a decade. Kusturica, who was born in Sarajevo but has not returned since the 1992-95 war, is also known for provocative views. One of his Palme d'Or films, "Underground" (1995), was accused by critics of being too pro-Serb. Nearly a quarter century after the conflict that killed 100,000 people, Bosnia remains divided along communal lines, with power shared between Serb, Muslim and Croat constituencies. —AFP



Aamir Khan to star in Bollywood 'Forrest Gump' remake

Bollywood megastar Aamir Khan announced yesterday that he is to star in an official Hindi-language remake of hit American movie "Forrest Gump". Khan will play the role of Laal Singh Chaddha, based on Tom Hanks's character in the 1994 multiple-award-winning US classic. "I have always loved 'Forrest Gump' as a script. It is a life-affirming story. It is a feel-good film. It is a film for the whole family," Khan told reporters in Mumbai on his 54th birthday. "Forrest Gump" won six Oscars, including best picture, best director and best actor for Hanks.

The film was directed by Robert Zemeckis and was based on Winston Groom's 1986 novel of the same name. It centers on the life of a dim-witted but kind man whose life mirrors key events in America in the 20th century. Khan, who last appeared in box office flop "Thugs of Hindostan", said he would lose 20 kilograms (45 pounds) for the role. "I have to be lean and slim," he explained, adding that shooting would start in October. Hollywood blockbusters have long inspired the Mumbai-based Hindi film industry.

Action-thriller "Kaante" (2002) was influenced by Quentin Tarantino's "Reservoir Dogs" while "Sarkar" (2005) was likened to "The Godfather" and "Chachi 420" was similar to "Mrs Doubtfire", although they weren't official remakes. Khan's adaptation of "Forrest Gump" is expected to hit screens next year. Khan said the rights to the movie were bought from Paramount. An official remake of 2014 Hollywood film "The Fault in Our Stars" is also in the works. —AFP



Joss Stone plays 'unofficial gig' in North Korea



This handout from Koryo Tours shows British singer-songwriter Joss Stone (right) performing in a bar in Pyongyang. — AFP photos

British singer-songwriter Joss Stone performed an informal gig in the capital of nuclear-armed North Korea as part of her ambitious project to perform in every country on earth. Stone, who has performed in more than 175 countries since embarking on the Total World Tour five years ago, was pictured singing in a bar in Pyongyang in front of a small group of tourists and guides on Wednesday night. The 31-year-old artist, who has recently sung in Syria, Pakistan and Iraq, announced the trip on Instagram Tuesday before boarding a plane to the North.

"It's a fine day to go to North Korea," she said in a video message taken at the Beijing Capital International Airport. "We'll be getting on a plane very soon to go to Pyongyang...? A place in North Korea, anyway. It's gonna be fun," she added. Stone said she was practicing



British singer-songwriter Joss Stone (third right) posing for a photo in Pyongyang.

a traditional Korean folk song 'Arirang'—listed as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage in both the North and South—for her audience in Pyongyang. The visit was arranged by Simon Cockerell, who runs Koryo Tours, which specialises in trips to the isolated country.

Cockerell described the performance as an "unofficial gig" and posted photos of Stone singing for around 40 tourists and guides at a bar he identified as the Yanggakdo cinema complex. "Let's do it again with a full band and thousands of local fans not too far in the future!!" he wrote on his Instagram with a picture of Stone departing from the North Korean capital. It is rare for North Korea to allow foreign musicians to perform for ordinary citizens, though last year a handful of South Korean pop artists were invited to Pyongyang amid a rapid rapprochement on the Korean peninsula. — AFP

Brain orgasms? The ASMR relaxation trend seducing the internet

Tapping fingernails triggering goosebumps, whispers sending shivers down the spine: the brain-tingling world of ASMR has the internet clamoring for sounds that feel good. The auditory-sensory phenomenon sees people experience waves of calm and pleasurable quivers of the mind often referred to as "brain orgasms"—and it's emerging from the depths of the web into the pop culture mainstream as a means to relax. ASMR, short for autonomous sensory meridian response, has become a full-fledged internet sensation, with YouTube creators notching millions of views for clips featuring stimuli—soft whispers into a microphone, long nails tapping, noodle slurping—to set off a prickle at the back of the neck.

"It's that moment where all the hair on your body stands up," said Bianca Hammonds, who works on the ASMR channel for the US music outlet Fuse. "You kind of feel your body vibrate," she told AFP. "It's like this zen moment." A beer commercial aired during the Super Bowl recently showcased ASMR, with actress Zoe Kravitz whispering, drumming her fingers against a bottle and pouring the liquid to release a gentle fizz. But it's largely hip hop's tastemakers who have ushered it onto the scene, with rap stars making their own ASMR videos or even integrating its techniques into their songs. — AFP



A journalist talks into a microphone in Washington. — AFP