

Hope runs high for mega spin-offs, including crew training, from Cape Town Film Studios

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Sapa-AFP

CAPE TOWN: When actor Nicolas Cage made love to Bridget Moynahan in the 2005 hit *Lord of War*, a pungent smell still hung over the old Cape Town fertiliser plant-turned-movie studio where the scene was filmed.

Even its chief executive Nico Dekker said the site opposite a sewerage works was a "stinky" and "hellish" place.

Yet the revamped factory helped turn South Africa into a top-notch movie-making spot, attracting film-makers from around the world and showing that the time was right to build a new multi-million dollar complex.

Construction recently started to turn 200 hectares near pristine wetlands and lush Cape vineyards into Africa's first state-of-the-art studio worthy of Hollywood or Bollywood.

"It is like manna, honey to the bees. It positions us as believing in the future of film-making in Africa," Dekker said.

Cape Town Film Studios, initially named Dreamworld, is 25km outside the city. It is the country's largest investment in its film industry, which employs more than 20 000 people.

Hope runs high it will boost the sector's annual earnings from the current R1 billion to as much as four times that amount.

The project, estimated at R430m funded by shareholders and a R30m investment by the Western Cape government, has been five years in the making. The first stage should take shape within a year and construction should be completed by February 2010.

"The stars of the world are going to cry and love here, make wars here," Dekker said.

Such an investment during a global recession does not daunt Dekker, who has confi-

dence in South Africa's varied locations, lower production costs and what he touts as highly skilled crews.

Already parts of the 2008 film *10 000 BC*, the 2006 hit *Blood Diamond* with Leonardo DiCaprio and movies starring big names such as Steven Seagal, Juliette Binoche and Andie MacDowell have been filmed here.

"People don't come to South Africa only for the locations," he said. "Now you can shoot through winter so you attract a

different kind of production."

The only other African country with a bustling film industry is Nigeria, but its films are low-budget, mobile, non-studio productions shot on video which are often pirated as soon as they hit the streets. Morocco has a big studio in Ourzazate, which has hosted productions such as the 2006 film *Babel* with Brad Pitt and Cate Blanchett, but is not on the scale of Cape Town Film Studios.

And with one of the largest

Indian communities outside India, South Africa is big on Bollywood. Indian producers have flocked to film on location here in recent years and the new studio is expected to attract even more.

Bollywood producer Kumar Taurani spent three months in South Africa last year shooting the action thriller *Prince of Thieves*, after 45 days in 2007 filming the blockbuster *Race*.

"We got permission to shoot almost everywhere. We blocked

roads for days, all government organisations gave us full co-operation," Taurani said.

Outside a handful of movies like the 2006 *Tsotsi* that earned an Oscar for best foreign language film, South African productions have no appeal for an international audience.

Several projects are in the pipeline including a crew training academy at the studio and cheaper rates for South African producers when major films are not in the making.