

## FILM

# Muslim faith and family life tested in Berlinale films

**BERLIN:** Maryam, Samir and Ismail are three young Muslims living in Berlin who find their faith and values tested in Afghan-German director Burhan Qurbani's film *Shahada*, which premiered at the recent Berlin Film Festival.

While 19-year-old Maryam is drifting in an ultra-conservative direction, leading her into conflict with her liberal father, Samir is unsure how to deal with his deepening feelings for another man. In the case of young police officer Ismail, his life is thrown off balance by an accident with his police pistol.

*Shahada*, which refers to the Muslim testimony of faith, is one of a series of movies screened at this year's Berlinale exploring the impact of contemporary, often western pressures, on family life and values espoused by the Muslim faith - and their occasional clashes.

The movies seek to explore some of the most controversial aspects of modern Muslim life, from so-called honor killings to fundamentalism, as well as the under class of illegal immigrants and dead-end jobs that some Muslims find themselves trapped in.

"I wanted to show that Muslim is not just Arabic but you find Muslims in every part of the world," said Qurbani, who tries to break down media stereotyping of Muslims in his film.

"We wanted to tell stories where we push our characters to the margins of what they can bear," he said. *Shahada* aims to tell a universal story, which could be linked to any religious faith. "Our film is a call for dialogue," said Qurbani. "That is the objective of the film. Let's talk."

In Sarajevo-born director Jasmila Zbanic's *Na Putu (On the Path)*, Luna and Amar are a young couple whose relationship comes under great strain when Amar becomes involved in an isolated fundamentalist Muslim community.

Luna asks Amar to return home, but Amar



Afghan-German director Burhan Qurbani tries to break down media stereotyping of Muslims in his film. (dpa)

insists that his life in the community has brought him peace and keeps him from drinking.

Another screening in Berlin was *My Name is Khan*, a film essentially about tolerance, with Bollywood megastar Shahrukh Khan playing an unlikely hero - Rizvan Khan, an Indian Muslim, living in post 9/11 America, who suffers from the autistic disorder Asperger's syndrome.

The conflict between traditional and contemporary Islamic values is portrayed more dramatically in Vienna-born Feo Aladag's debut feature *Die Fremde (When we leave)*.

In the film, a young Turkish woman's attempts to escape an abusive husband places her on a collision course with her family, ultimately

ending in catastrophe.

Played by 29-year-old Sibel Kekilli, Umay takes her son Cem, leaves Istanbul and heads to Germany hoping family devotion will override social convention and protect her from her husband.

Instead, the family tries to restore their honor by arranging for Cem to be returned to his father in Istanbul. Events soon spiral out of control.

For Kekilli a key part of the problem lies in the failure of western nations such as Germany to integrate migrants from countries such as Turkey.

"The older generation has so repeatedly



From left to right: Shah Rukh Khan, Kajol Devgan, and Karan Johar, members of the team for the film *My Name is Khan*. (dpa)

been rejected, and that experience even gets to the younger ones," Kekilli said in an interview with the German Press Agency dpa. "I also feel that the chasm between mainstream society and the migrants is growing," she added.

Directors Agostino Imondi, from Switzerland, and German-born Dietmar Ratsch used a family from Lebanon battling to remain in Germany to tell another side of the pressures on modern Muslim life.

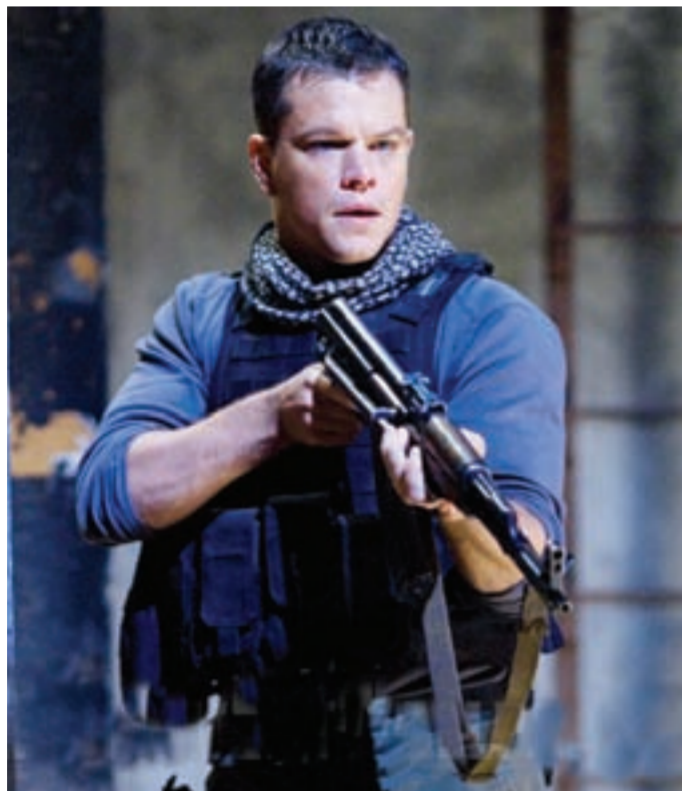
In the documentary *Neukoelln Unlimited*, the Akkouch children Lial, Hassan and Maradona are talented singers and dancers and have lived in the multi-cultural Berlin district of Neukoelln since early childhood.

But while their family has spent the past 18 years in Germany, their residency status remains unresolved and they live in constant fear of being deported to Lebanon.

"This story beautifully illustrates issues of human rights, the politics of asylum and integration and discrimination in general," said Ratsch. But Hassan believes that immigrants have to be practical about life in their new country.

"When you are growing up you first have to understand that you aren't a foreigner. You're German," he said. "After that, integration is simple because you say, 'This is my country, I want to work here too.'" -dpa

## Green Zone is a failure of intelligence



FILE - Still scene from the movie *Green Zone* starring Matt Damon

**Running time:** 114 minutes  
**Rated:** R for violence and language  
★☆☆☆

**LOS ANGELES:** All the war-zone authenticity in the Arab world cannot salvage the silly Hollywood plot at the heart of *Green Zone*, Matt Damon and Paul Greengrass' first collaboration outside the Jason Bourne realm.

Their thriller about the futile search for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq is a visual and visceral knockout that's utterly deflated by a story as common, coarse and unappetizing as Army field rations. The movie pales further by arriving in theaters just days after the Academy Awards triumph of the vastly superior Iraq war story *The Hurt Locker*, a film many people have yet to see. For the price of a couple of tickets to *Green Zone*, you can own the DVD of a truly great war film in *The Hurt Locker*.

*Green Zone* emulates the let's-build-a-democracy-just-like-ours intent of the US occupation of Iraq in 2003, as chronicled in Washington Post reporter Rajiv Chandrasekaran's *Imperial Life in the*

*Emerald City*, a book cited in the credits as the inspiration for the movie.

Greengrass and screenwriter Brian Koppelman have taken a setting rich with novel dramatic possibilities and made up a fictional action tale just like any other, with the same lame plot contrivances and the same stiff, artificial characters.

You've got the incorruptible working-class patriot in Army Chief Warrant Officer Roy Miller (Damon), who leads a WMD team frustrated that detailed intelligence reports continually fail to turn up any traces of Saddam Hussein's supposed arsenals.

You've got the sniveling, scheming bureaucrat in Pentagon intelligence man Clark Poundstone (Greg Kinnear) and an internecine clash with his honorable nemesis in CIA man Martin Brown (Brendan Gleeson). OK, so the CIA good guy thing is kind of new.

You've got the cliched journalist in Wall Street Journal reporter Lawrie Dayne (Amy Ryan), who seems incapable of piecing together a story unless it's handed to her in a neat folder marked "top secret."

And you've got the Special Forces

thug in Lt. Col. Briggs (Jason Isaacs).

We all know now the weapons that prompted the invasion of Iraq did not exist. The filmmakers concoct a simple-minded WMD conspiracy to explain the bad intelligence reports, then lob Miller into the middle of it.

Miller's encounter with well-meaning Iraqi "Freddy" (Khalid Abdalla, who played one of the Sept. 11 hijackers in Greengrass' "United 93") leads him to one of Saddam's top aides, who holds the key to exposing the conspiracy.

Other than Abdalla, who captures a sense of Iraqi's conflicted emotions over Saddam's overthrow and the U.S. occupation, Damon and his co-stars deliver nothing more than serviceable performances. The roles do not call for much more, Ryan in particular stuck trying to make her few shallow lines sound meaningful.

The WMD debacle was a colossal intelligence failure that Greengrass and company dilute to a base Hollywood plot device so they can turn the boys loose in Baghdad with all the firepower a big studio budget can muster.

There's barely a story to hold *Green Zone* together, the movie just hurtling

through firefights and chases, pausing for breath with the occasional revelation to prod Miller on in his quest.

For pure ambience, *Green Zone* is a marvel. Though shot in Morocco, Spain and England, the action feels as though it takes place in the heart of Baghdad.

Greengrass, who directed Damon in *The Bourne Ultimatum* and *The Bourne Supremacy*, applies similar techniques - darting camera work, quick cutting, haphazard framing - to create the same sense of documentary immediacy in *Green Zone*.

Only the barest traces of the occupation absurdities revealed in Chandrasekaran's book remain. Poundstone's remark that "Democracy is messy" is a faint echo of the Donald Rumsfeld observation that "freedom's untidy," while the filmmakers toss in a few glimpses of the blind luxury enjoyed in the safe American Green Zone while Iraqis clamor for water and loot buildings outside.

Chandrasekaran's book is a work of sharp, informative journalism. That "inspired by" credit sounds a little insulting when the result is tired, standard action fare such as *Green Zone*. -AP

## Quran recitation international competition launched

**KUWAIT:** His Highness the Prime Minister, Sheikh Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah in his capacity as representative of His Highness the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah inaugurated Kuwait International Holy Quran Recitation competition at the Sheraton Hotel on Wednesday.

Deputy Prime Minister for Legal Affairs, Minister of Justice and Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, Chief Justice Rashid Al-Hamad, sheikhs, ministers, ambassadors, religious scholars, and senior statesmen attended the event which is organized by the Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs.

The Deputy Prime Minister for Legal Affairs and the Undersecretary for Awqaf and Islamic Affairs Dr. Adel Al-Falah delivered speeches on the occasion.

A documentary film highlighting the history of Quranic sciences and activities in Kuwait was shown.

His Highness the prime minister, who was honored during the event and presented with a copy of the holy Quran, toured an exhibition held on the occasion of the competition at the end of the ceremonies. -KUNA

## Saudi King hands in KFIP 2010 awards

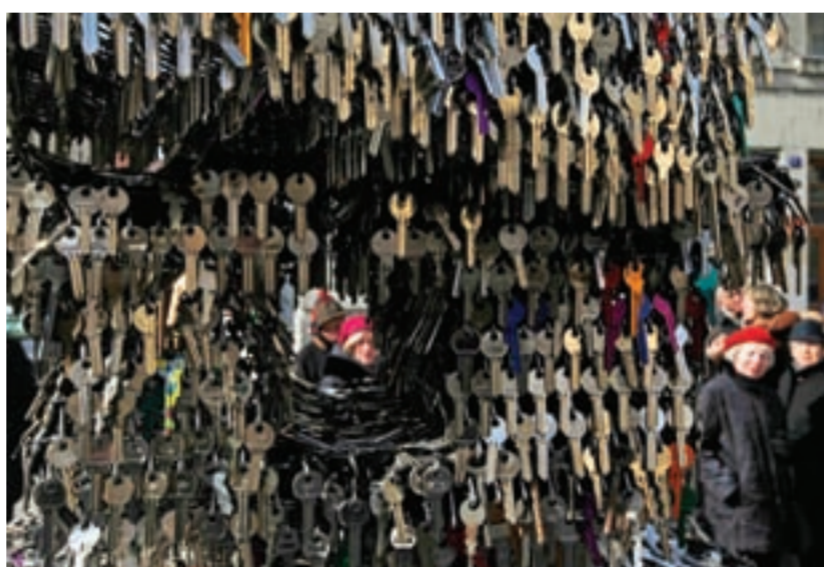
**RIYADH:** King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia on Tuesday handed awards to winners of King Faisal International Prize (KFIP).

Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan won the KFIP's award for service to Islam while the prize for Arabic Language and Literature was won by Professor Abderrahman El-Houari Hadj-Saleh and professor Ramzi Mounir Baalbaki for their studies dealing with Arabic grammatical thought.

The KFIP's award for Science and Mathematics was won by Enrico Bombieri and Professor Terence Chi-Shen Tao.

In the medical genre, Professor Reinhold Ganz, Professor Jean-Pierre Pelletier, and Professor Johanne Martel-Pelletier won the prize for their efforts in Non-Arthroplasty Management of Degenerative Joint Disease. -KUNA

## ART



Tourists look at the 'Key Statue' at the Franz Kafka Square in central Prague, March 10, 2010. People from all over the Czech Republic brought 85,741 keys for the occasion of the 20th anniversary of 1989 Velvet Revolution and helped create the world's largest collection of keys. The statue's shape spells the word 'Revoluce', or Revolution. (Reuters)



A guest takes a picture of a work by Japanese artist Beat Takeshi Kitano, called 'The First Japanese Criminal who Escaped Death from Hanging' at the Cartier Foundation for Contemporary Art which is part of his show, 'Gosse de Peintre' (Painter's Son) in Paris March 9, 2010. (Reuters)



Members of the China Disabled People's Performing Art Troupe (CDPPAT) present the thousand-hand Bodhisattva by the hearing impaired performers, in Amman, Jordan, Monday, March 8, 2010. A total of 104 artists, all with hearing, visual or physical impairments, performed an array of songs, dances, dramas and Peking opera acts in the show. (AP)



A man looks at 'Muhlberg Armour of Emperor Charles V' by Desiderius Helmschmid during the media presentation of the exhibit 'The Art of Power. The Royal Armoury and court portraiture' at Madrid's Prado Museum March 8, 2010. (Reuters)