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## DIFF 2008

AROUND EMIRATES



Hadrian Hernandez/Gulf News

Yes, Madam, Sir offers a personal insight into Kiran Bedi through the eyes of her father, her daughter and her husband and is narrated by Dame Helen Mirren.

## Salute to a Real Life Hero

By Jyoti Kalsi, Gulf News Report

Published: December 17, 2008, 23:27

### Megan Doneman's Yes, Madam, Sir is a biopic of India's most celebrated - and controversial - super cop, Kiran Bedi.

The two women could not be more different. Kiran Bedi is a feisty cop who has always led from the front and taken on the system to revolutionise policing in India. Since 1972, when she became the first woman to join the Indian Police Service, Bedi has lived her life in the media glare. Megan Doneman is a young, soft spoken Australian producer, director and writer who is so media shy that refuses to be photographed while being interviewed about her first feature film, Yes, Madam, Sir being screened at DIFF 2008.

But the two women connected instantly during their first meeting. Many years ago, Doneman travelled to India to ask for Bedi's permission to make a film based on her life. And Bedi not only agreed, but also invited the young Australian to stay in her home, giving her complete freedom to film her at home, at work and at social events. "My mother travels to India regularly and I had heard about Bedi from her. I was in my 20s, when I first saw her being interviewed on TV, I immediately knew that my first feature film should be about her," says Doneman.

Bedi says she didn't realise just how big a project the young director had in mind, but she trusted her instinctively. "I didn't have the time to sit down for interviews and I felt that I would never be able to explain to her how things are in India; so I just told her to follow me around with her camera and see for herself. We signed no contract and I saw the film for the first time at its international premiere screening at the Toronto Film Festival," she says.

### Highs and lows

Doneman followed Bedi around for over

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Doneman followed Bedi around for over six years recording the dramatic highs and lows in her turbulent career. "In between my work on various Hollywood and Australian films, I would travel to India every year. But serendipitously, every time I was there something major would happen in Kiran's life. In fact, something interesting is always happening in her life. No writer could have written that stuff.

Editing the 500 hours of footage into a 95 minute film was extremely difficult. But I knew I had a great film and I got Helen Mirren to be the narrator, because I wanted someone with the same charisma, strength and commanding presence as Kiran."

The final film is an honest portrayal of Bedi. With her camera and through conversations with Bedi's colleagues and family, Doneman has beautifully captured every aspect of this multi faceted real life hero — the tough, rebellious cop, the committed social worker and the affectionate daughter, mother and wife.

The film begins with Bedi's father declaring his resolve to ensure that his four daughters would get the education and opportunities denied to most Indian girls at that time. It traces Bedi's career from the early years where her subordinates referred to her as "that girl" to the point where she had earned their respect and admiration and was addressed first as Madam and then as Sir.

### Emotional moments

It covers her heroic lathi (baton) charges of sword wielding rioters, her innovative prison reforms during her stint as the first woman Inspector General of Tihar Prison, her revolutionary training methods, while in charge of the police training school and her dedication to the education of underprivileged women and children and the rehabilitation of prisoners and drug addicts.

It also covers emotional moments such as her winning the Magsaysay Award, being appointed by the UN to train civilian troops around the world, the many times she was unceremoniously transferred and vilified by jealous superiors or unhappy politicians and her lowest moment when she resigned from the police last year.

But, perhaps the film's biggest strength is the insights it offers into Bedi the person through the eyes of her father, her daughter and her husband.

"What I admire most about her is that she has the courage to be who she is.

I am happy to be included in the Cinema of the World segment at DIFF because this is not just an Indian story. It is a universal, timeless and inspiring story about standing up for your convictions and never giving up. During today's difficult times, this story gives us hope," says Doneman.

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