



▼ Anees Bazmee braves the heat to direct scenes at the Sofitel.

"I LOVE DUBAI – THERE ARE GREAT LOCATIONS AND IF YOU COME AT THE RIGHT TIME, IT IS AMAZING TO SHOOT HERE. IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO GET SUCH LOCATIONS ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD." Anees Bazmee

A WARM WELCOME

Director Anees Bazmee on the making of Bollywood sequel, Welcome Back

By any filmmaker's estimation, making a sequel to a popular film such as 'Welcome', India's second highest grossing film of 2007, is no mean feat.

The blend of action and comedy, along with a clever script and a celebrity A-list cast were all factors behind the success of the original film, but director Anees Bazmee is confident that fans of Welcome

will warm to its sequel, Welcome Back, which is due to hit screens in the first quarter of 2015.

Welcome Back was mainly filmed in the UAE, with the bulk of the film shot during four separate shoots in the country between August and October 2014, and the cast and crew were upbeat about the production when Digital Studio caught up with them on location in Dubai.

Bazmee, a writer and director known for hit films including Pyaar To Hona Hi

Tha (1998), Deewana Mastana (1997) and No Entry (2005), told Digital Studio that the production was progressing well during the final stages of the shoot in Dubai. He also lauded the UAE and Dubai as a place to produce films.

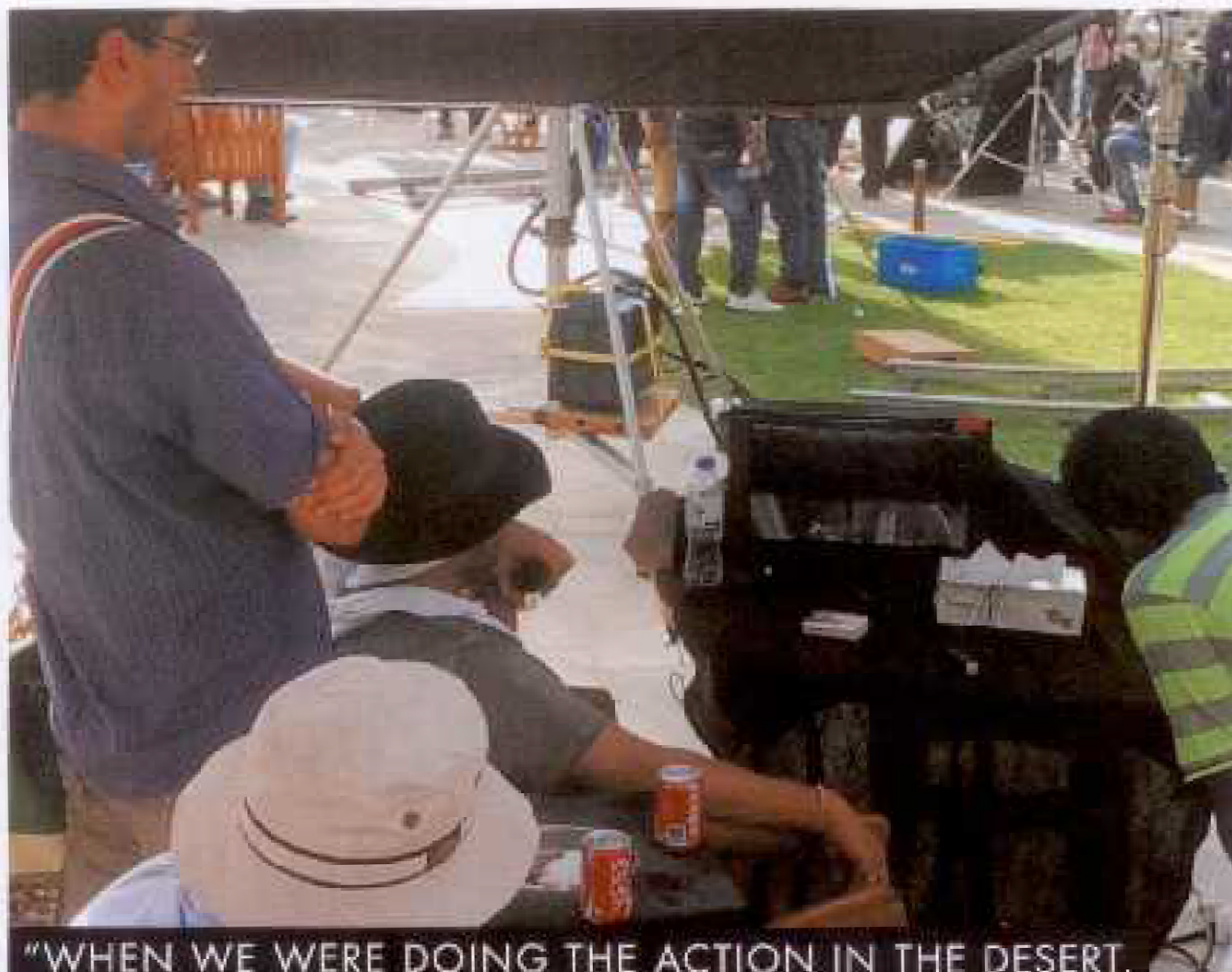
"Shooting is going fantastic except for the weather. People here are very warm and friendly, there's a lot of equipment here and we are getting good locations, so it is not very difficult to shoot here," he said. "I love Dubai – there are great loca-

ACTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

Bollywood actor Shiney Ahuja plays a rich, spoiled man in *Welcome Back*. Ahuja told Digital Studio that the character is dreamy and hallucinates, a factor which made the role more challenging to play. "I just thought 'how would a person hallucinate', so I just put myself in a mindspace - how would I feel if I was hallucinating?"

"It has been interesting playing the role. The director has made it easy for me because of the clarity in the brief that he gave me," Ahuja said, adding that one of the main challenges was acting during the heat of late summer in Dubai.

Ahuja said that he thinks fans of the first film will like the sequel, as it retains the spirit of the original while bringing something new. "The mood point is the same as the first film yet it's fresh. The mood, the humour, the madness, it is all the same," he said.



"WHEN WE WERE DOING THE ACTION IN THE DESERT, WE HAD CLOSE TO EIGHT 4K CAMERAS AND A VARIETY OF LENSES, SO THAT WAS BY ITSELF A HUGE THING. IT WAS AN AMAZING EXPERIENCE." Firoz A Nadiadwala

tions and if you come at the right time, it is amazing to shoot here. It is very difficult to get such locations anywhere in the world."

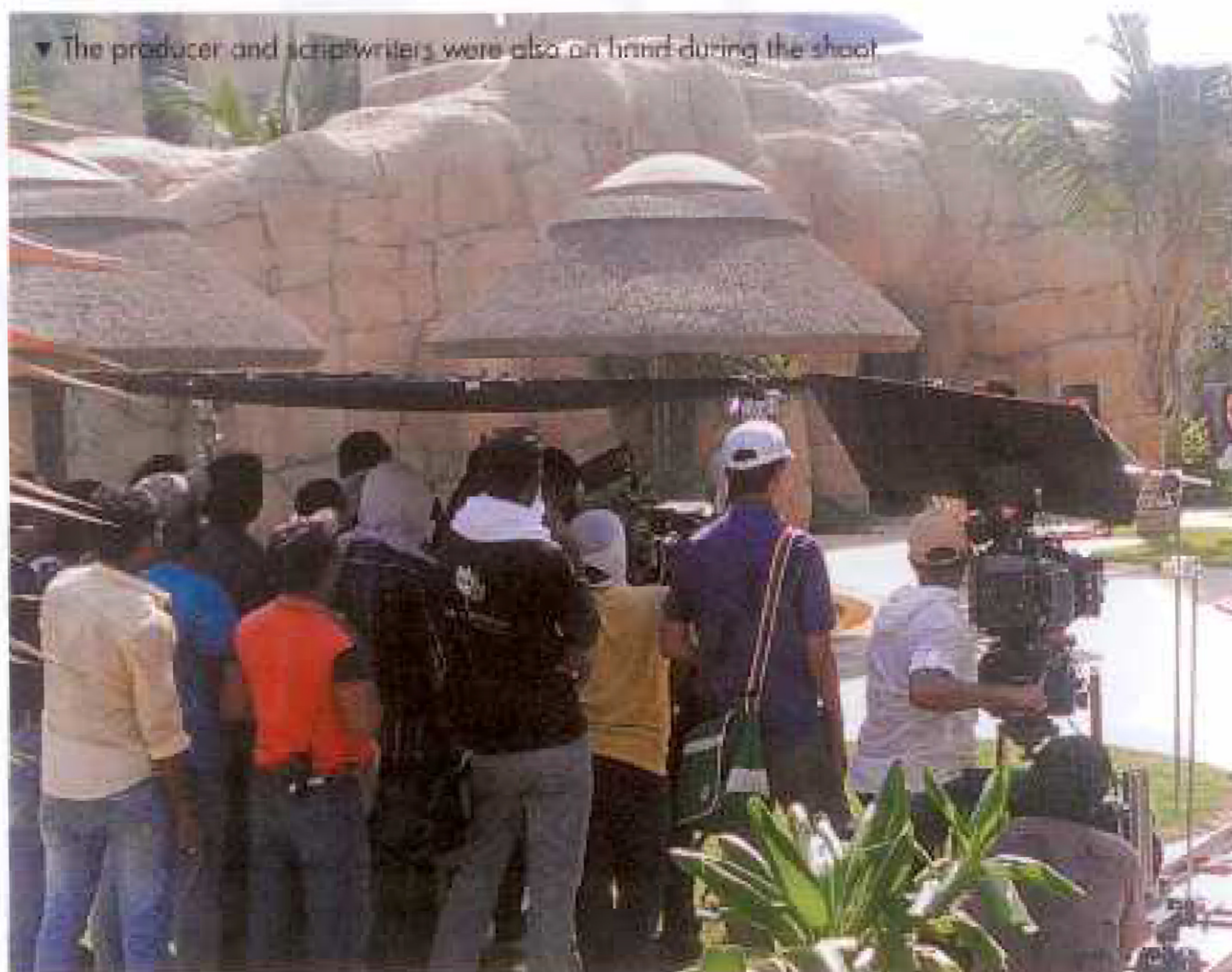
When asked about the style of the film, Bazmee said that his aim was to please fans of *Welcome* by combining elements of the first film with something new.

"People love that picture [*Welcome*] and they are watching it again and again, so if you change the entire thing maybe they will not like it, but if you make the same kind of film, they will say 'why?'."

"It is a very difficult situation for me as a writer and director to make this picture. When you see this picture you will see something of the first one and something very new and different also. I wanted to make the second one bigger and better, and I think I have succeeded in that."

Bazmee added that the film includes a significant amount of special effects work and interesting camera angles.

Fans of *Welcome* can expect to see plenty of action in the sequel. The film's producer, Firoz A Nadiadwala, said that



▼ The producer and scriptwriters were also on hand during the shoot

the production included action scenes such as a helicopter chase in the desert and skydiving scenes. "Some of the locations we have used here and some action sequences we have done, it's unthinkable

the way it has come out in terms of the technique employed - it has come out very well," he said.

"When we were doing the action in the desert, we had close to eight 4K cameras



▲ The movie was filmed during four shoots in Dubai, including at the Sofitel, Palm Jumeirah.

and a variety of lenses, so that was by itself a huge thing. It was an amazing experience."

Nadiadwala added that the team employed some "new techniques on the graphics side" to enhance the special effects, although he was reluctant to divulge more specific details. However, the audience is likely to be impressed by the diversity of the film: "There are skydivers and different types of helicopters in these action sequences. It will be like a colour pallet," he said. "You've got comedy, romance, glamour, thrills, stunts and stunning locations."

"It is a family entertainer but made on a lavish, grand scale. We just want to – as much as possible – meet the audiences expectations, and that is what we are doing."

The producer confirmed that post-production work was carried out simultaneously with filming, helping to pave the way for release in the first quarter of 2015.

Welcome Back is just one of many Bollywood – not to mention Hollywood



– films to select the UAE as a location for production. In September, it was reported that Indian screen legend Shah Rukh Khan was filming Happy New Year at the Atlantis, The Palm in Dubai.

The Dubai Film and TV Commission (DFTC) confirmed that Happy New Year,

WRITING FOR LAUGHS

Rajeev Kaul, a veteran Bollywood scriptwriter who has credits dating back to 1985, wrote the screenplay for Welcome Back with Anees Bazmee. He said that as a sequel, Welcome Back differs from other film sequels. "This is the first time we are experimenting, from the first film we are just taking the germs and redirecting it into a fresh story, taking protagonists from the first one and putting them again in the second film and developing a new story. There are new characters: the hero and the heroine are new, while the rest of three protagonists are the same."

Kaul said that he devised the story, developed it and then wrote the screenplay along with Bazmee and the writing team. Comedy scriptwriter Raaj Shaandilyaa then wrote the actual script. Kaul said that the cast "jumped when they heard the script narrated and the rest is history".

"They liked it and they could immediately work out in their minds that it had got something to do with the first film. It is the next step from the first one. The people will not get disconnected, they will be connected to the first film. That is why the title is Welcome Back!"

Shaandilyaa, who has earned a place in the Limca Book – India's equivalent of the Guinness Book of Records – for having written the most episodes of a non-fiction comedy show – said that writing his first feature film script was a daunting challenge.

"Anees Bazmee is a very good writer but it's the first time a writer is writing for him. It's a very big challenge for me because I have written comedy shows like Comedy Circus and Movers and Shakers, but this was my first film."

"I was nervous because the dialogue of Welcome was famous, with all the actors playing great characters. The audience is the king and the judge, they will let us know what is good and what is bad, but I did my best."



TECHNOLOGY PARTNER

Zekir Hussain, director of Icon Art Production (IAP), a Dubai-based film and TV production and rental company, worked with the producers of *Welcome Back*, providing equipment including cameras, lights and grips.

This included: an Alexa XT, an Epic Mysterium, an Angenieux Optimo and a variety of lenses which were used during the desert schedule in Dubai for 20 days. Other equipment included Arimax lights, which boosted the production speed on set; a fully equipped Panther dolly, a Jimmy Jib and more.

"It was a very interesting project, with an incredibly creative team on set with so much positive energy," Hussain said. "We made sure we worked along with the plans of the production and delivered their expectations. Our team would be the first on location and last to leave."

Speaking about Bollywood productions in the UAE, Hussain said: "So far in past two years, we have worked on over 16 films with small, medium and large budgets. I am sure that in 2015 there will be even more Bollywood productions in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, as both Dubai Film Commission and Abu Dhabi film Commission with twofour54 are supporting the productions."

Hussain added that the way the Bollywood industry works with respect to overseas shoots is changing, with more producers looking to make films entirely in Dubai. "A lot of projects are on my table for discussion to shoot completely in Dubai," he said. "We have over 20 films in the pipeline for 2015, but we lose films to Bangkok, Fiji, London etc. The more we support the budgets, the larger productions will happen."

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▲ The cast and crew lauded Dubai as a film location, but said the summer heat was a challenge.

also starring Deepika Padukone and Abhishek Bachchan, would be mostly shot on *The Palm*.

A few months earlier, in May, *Bang Bang*, a Bollywood movie from director Siddharth Anand, started production in Abu Dhabi.

For Nadiadwala, there were many reasons to choose Dubai as the location for the majority of filming. "Everything has gone very well and we have had some very strong support from Dubai Studio City, from Mr Jamil Sherif [chairman of Dubai Film & TV Commission and managing director of Dubai Studio City]. We were able to get some fantastic locations, every facility was available. I think this is

the only Bollywood movie that has been filmed 90% in Dubai."

Nadiadwala added that in terms of locations, the UAE benefits from a genuine diversity of locations: "The best part about the UAE is you have every best part of the world here. You can get every type of architectural wonder: Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, Sydney, Perth, London, everything is here. The people are nice, the government is very cooperative, transportation is good and airline connections are very helpful.

"There is a great deal of comfort filming here, especially for the film stars from India. From Mumbai, it is just about a two hour flight from Bombay." ○