

'We must encourage discussion on inclusivity'

Kabir Khan, Onir, Rima Das and Imtiaz Ali say pressing topics must be explored as they ready films for a film festival in wMelbourne

MOHAR BASU

mohar.basu@mid-day.com

A LITTLE over a month ago, the Indian Film Festival of Melbourne (IFFM) invited applications from filmmakers interested in collaborating with four Bollywood directors, including Kabir Khan, Imtiaz Ali, Rima Das and Onir, for the creation of a special project. Four films on the subjects of race, disability, sexuality and gender-politics will be helmed by the creators, and compiled for the making of a movie titled *My Melbourne*, which will premiere at the festival's 2021 edition, before travelling to other festivals. Festival director Mitu Bhowmick Lange, who is overseeing the project, has called for the creation of authentic stories of migrants' experiences.

Das tells mid-day, "It is essential for filmmakers to examine the world around them from a socio-political [lens]. The short film will allow us to present those authentic stories that often get lost in popular culture."

Growing introspective in the lockdown, people are now increasingly compassionate about social causes, says Khan, which makes the celebration of diversity, essential. "The pandemic has made evident how futile [many things] are." Ali adds, "Viewing stories about iden-

tity is quintessential to chart our path ahead. I am looking forward to meeting new people, and understanding their stories for the screen." Onir hopes the short films yield actionable results instead of merely triggering dialogue. "The world we live in calls for fresh discussions on inclusivity to [establish] a strong value system." While the directors will work with their teams over conference calls, they will travel to Melbourne to shoot, when restrictions are lifted.

