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## Russian industry fetes top grossers

By Nick Holdsworth

MOSCOW -- The producers and distributors of Russia's top-grossing boxoffice hits of 2005 gathered in Moscow on Monday night to celebrate the region's booming exhibition and home entertainment market in the industry's 9th annual "Blockbuster" awards, organized by trade weekly "Russian Film Business Today."

Afghan war drama "9-ya Rota" (The 9th Company) -- released in September -- broke all boxoffice records to take \$25.6 million in Russia, Ukraine, Kazhastan and other neighboring former Soviet states.

That figure has already been eclipsed this year by "Dnevnoi Dozor" (Day Watch) -- the sequel to 2004 Russian hit "Nochnoi Dozor" (Night Watch) -- which was released at midnight Dec. 31 and has thus far taken \$32 million in Russia and surrounding countries, Igor Burenkov, director of social affairs for producers the First Channel, said Monday.

"9-ya Rota" was produced by Alexander Rodnyansky and directed by Fedor Bondarchuk -- son of Oscar-winning director Sergei Bondarchuk ("War and Peace") and released by distributor of the year winner Gemini Film, whose range of domestic and foreign releases earned a total of \$77.23 million in the territory last year.

The film also won top honors Saturday in Moscow at the Golden Eagle awards -- one of two annual Russian national film award ceremonies -- where it was named the best film of 2005.

Rodnyansky, general director of fourth-ranked national television network STS, said Russia's boxoffice boom still has a long way to go.

"The market for exhibition alone is poised to more than double to \$800 million annually within the next three years. If you combine that with predicted growth in television and home entertainment you definitely have one of the most interesting parts of the world in terms of expansion," Rodnyansky said in an interview.

Said Gemini Film's Michael Schlicht: "Russia is the tenth biggest-grossing market worldwide -- and for some of the Hollywood majors, sixth biggest after Italy. It is one of the fastest developing and most liberal markets. China is a big market, but offers nothing like the freedom for international product."

Russians went to the cinema on average 0.3 times per person a year, Schlicht added, compared with 5.6 in the U.S., which suggested there remained huge potential for growth here.

Their comments were underscored by a video message screened during the Blockbuster awards from Dreamworks SKG co-founder Jeffrey Katzenberg, whose company was named as the top-grossing foreign studio in Russia and the CIS (Confederation of Independent States, made up of former Soviet countries) with total earnings in 2005 of \$36.3 million from the territory, including \$8.59 million for animated hit "Madagascar."

Katzenberg praised "Russian Film Business Today" -- founded and published by Alexander Semenov -- for its steadfast support of the Russian cinema business.

"Russia is the tenth-largest cinema market in the world, which shows how important and interesting the Russian market has become for us all," Katzenberg said in comments that were translated into Russian for the audience.

Nine other films in the top ten were also named in the Blockbuster awards, which give credit to the financial success of film sales in exhibition, DVD and video release.

Among those were "Turetsky Gambit" (Turkish Gambit) with \$19.9 million; "Mr. & Mrs. Smith" with \$10.1 million; and "Boy S Tenyu" (Shadow Boxing) with \$8.11 million.