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DELHI

## Police force closure of photo exhibition on Paris gay life



Neha Alawadhi

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### An anonymous person claims its content is obscene

The police have forced closure of an exhibition of eminent photographer Sunil Gupta at Alliance Française here following an anonymous complaint that its content was obscene.

A senior police officer told *The Hindu* that they had received a call on Saturday from an individual identifying himself as Hargovind. "He said a blue film was being played at Alliance Française. Since it is a diplomatic area, the police cannot enter the premises. Hence an area assistant sub-inspector went [there] and spoke to the manager and they decided to take action accordingly," the police officer said.

Mr. Gupta's exhibition, *Sun City and Other Stories: Paris-San Francisco-Delhi*, had opened to an enthusiastic response last Friday, and was scheduled to run till mid-April. An exploration of gay life, the exhibition featured 16 colour pictures taken by Mr. Gupta in France two years ago. The project involved a fictional narrative loosely based on the French science fiction film *La Jetée*, using homosexuality as a medium to connect to the life in Paris.

The closure of the exhibition flies in the face of the landmark judgment by the Delhi High Court which decriminalised homosexuality between two consenting adults. Mr. Gupta said the reasons for the shutdown weren't clear to him. "I was approached by Alliance Française to set up this exhibition since a large part of it was shot in Paris ... After the opening [on Friday] someone lodged a complaint and the police apparently asked for some pictures to be taken down. Alliance complied and I thought that was it."

Mr. Gupta said the Alliance Française management informed him on Saturday that the exhibition would be shut down for a day because of a fair at the cultural centre. However, "I was informed by a third party in the evening that it would

remain shut. No formal letter was sent...the decision was taken by the Alliance,” he added.

An official at Alliance Française said: “The decision to shut down the exhibition was taken by the director [of Alliance Française] unanimously with the artist. The opening of the exhibition, held on Friday, was a private affair and during the opening only it was decided that we will not continue with the exhibition.”

Members of the Safdar Hashmi Memorial Trust (SAHMAT) issued a statement protesting the unexplained shutdown. “If major institutions like them [Alliance Française] cannot stand up against complaints made by a single individual and support the work of an artist they have invited to exhibit, they do not deserve the respect or patronage of the art community ... We hope the Alliance will clarify the circumstances which have led to yet another instance of moral policing against the freedom of expression.”

Photographer Ram Rahman said “Alliance Française is an institution; they need to let the artist community know what happened. They have to issue a statement explaining why they took such action.” He added that the institution's director had not been responding to e-mails since Saturday.

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