

Anti-Pakistan Indian movies

THE time, 1954; the event, agitation by members of Pakistan's film industry against import of Indian movies; venue Lahore and the scene, a protest rally of producers, directors, artistes and technicians of the industry on The Mall urging the government to ban import of Indian films to protect national cinema.

Pakistan's cinema was then in its infancy but it was already vibrant and developing on commercially viable and professionally mature lines. The government accepted the film industry's plea and disallowed further import of Indian movies. The screening of already imported films was, however, permitted.

We move to 1965, to a time of upsurge of nationalistic sentiments as war broke out between Pakistan and India. The charged spirit of the people, the government reflecting their aspirations, led to the discontinuation of screening of all movies from the neighbouring country.

The policy has been strictly followed except when Gen Ziaul Haq was ruling Pakistan. He accorded personal permission to the screening of two Indian movies but he also disallowed the screening of two ventures by Pakistani filmmakers in collaboration with investors from Oman and the UAE because they featured Indian artistes.

The general was a three-in-one personality combining in his self the offices of President of Pakistan, Chief of the Army Staff and Chief Martial Law Administrator. He could grant special concessions to some individuals but refuse a stalwart of Pakistan's film industry, the late Sayed Shaukat Husain Rizvi, permission to screen in Pakistan the films he had produced and directed in the pre-independence period, films that he owned.

One of his actions, the decision to disallow film production by individuals not registered with the government as producers, spelled despair for the film industry as, for about a year and a half, no one was issued registration.

That caused the exit of some senior directors and professional investors from the industry and left the field to sycophants, to individuals wanting in education, command over the medium

and capacity to exploit it for entertainment and meaningful social and even political expression.

The scenario then changed. Shorn of its ability to sustain the traditions set by its first builders, the industry became fit only for delivering premature, undernourished and sick productions. The movement generated under the leadership of Gen Zia has completed the full circle by now in terms of quality and level of work.

The thinking of the people who manage the industry these days has also gone full circle. The demand for banning Indian movies has been transformed into a demand for importing these movies by a segment that presumably believes in Pakistan first policy and feels that film imports would further augment



friendly ties with the neighbouring countries.

Actually, there is nothing new to the proposition that has reportedly been sympathetically viewed by the Federal Ministry of Culture that is said to be placing a proposal for this purpose on the cabinet's agenda. Cable operators put practically every new Indian movie on the air, of course, without the permission of the authorities.

Apparently, the government, preoccupied with issues of such far-reaching implications as the campaign against terrorism, operations in the tribal areas, the controversy over commercial proliferation of nuclear technology, its policy of peace with India and other constraints imposed by regional and international developments, feels that contents on its plate are already spilling.

Inaction is considered a more prudent policy than determining the course of what the authorities presumably view as insignificant happenings. Caution, not valour of any denomination is the current watchword of the state.

Some of the leading Indian

film artistes have become household names in Pakistan and recent visits by a host of them that displayed their artistic assets and talents before packed and enthusiastic elite gatherings in Karachi and Lahore have helped swell ground conditions for their reception and greater popularity.

It is consequently not surprising that some people should be falling over each other to cash the new found friendly fragrance in the Pakistan-India atmosphere and in that, possibility also get their names in the good books of those who matter.

But if some exhibitors believe that Indian movies, with their liberal footage, high quality production, excellent standards of acting, lilting music, exciting dances and other attractions, would win back spectators, they may prove correct only in the short run because, unless censorship rule are specially relaxed for imported stuff, much of what these films contain would be scissored out and the rest would not attract hungry cats.

Or perhaps they would manage to screen edited footage, 'totas' to be exact. Either way, their next option would be demanding permission to screen X-rated or down right blue films. Or, they could get in to some more lucrative allied business offering overnight financial gains as also access to high places.

It is not yet clear if the government would permit film imports from India but the pressure for furthering friendship can be decisive and force the authorities to follow the policy adopted in some other cases, such as the barbed wire according finality to LoC.

Nothing is to be done in that case except that we should exercise our choice for importing films. One does not know what India would prefer to export first but I think that supporters of imports in the industry should insist that the first Indian movie to be screened in Pakistan in the new neighbourly order should be LoC-Kargil. The production is credited with policy and financial blessing of the Indian government. That would strengthen the bonds of Pakistan-Indian friendship like nothing else.—
ZEE ESS