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Indian Audiences Denied Blockbuster Over Pakistani Co-Star Controversy

July 20, 2025

– Categories: Human Rights



The Indian film industry is reeling from a heated controversy as audiences are barred from watching the latest hit from a prominent Punjabi and Bollywood star due to objections over his Pakistani co-star. The film, *Sardaar Ji 3*, a horror-comedy featuring Diljit Dosanjh and Pakistani actress Hania Aamir, has smashed box office records globally but faces a ban in India, driven by nationalist sentiments and geopolitical tensions following the 2025 Pahalgam terror attack. This article explores the clash between artistic freedom and national pride,

the industry's response, and the broader implications for cross-border cultural ties.

The Federation of Western India Cine Employees (FWICE) and other industry bodies have spearheaded the push to block *Sardaar Ji 3*'s release in India, citing the casting of Hania Aamir as a breach of national sentiment. The decision comes amid heightened tensions after the Pahalgam attack, which claimed 26 lives, prompting a crackdown on Pakistani artists in Indian cinema. FWICE president BN Tiwari emphasized, "We wrote to the Central Board of Film Certification (CBFC) to halt this film, as it's not just about one actor but about respecting national pride". The film's producers, however, argue that the casting was finalized before the recent escalation, and the movie was completed prior to the attack, a point echoed by Dosanjh's team, who defend the project's apolitical intent.

This ban reflects a broader shift in the Indian film industry, particularly in Punjab, where cross-border collaborations once thrived. The Punjabi film industry, known for hits like *Chal Mera Putt*, has historically embraced Pakistani talent to appeal to a shared linguistic audience. However, recent events, including inflammatory remarks by Pakistani actor Iftikhar Thakur, have hardened the industry's stance. Thakur's comments on a Pakistani TV show, threatening India post-Pahalgam, drew sharp criticism from Punjabi cinema stalwarts like Gurpreet Ghuggi, who said, "Artists should unite, not divide". This has led to a reevaluation of such partnerships, with producers now prioritizing national loyalty over commercial gains.

The controversy underscores a growing tension between art and politics in India. While *Sardaar Ji 3* enjoys global success, its absence from Indian screens highlights the cost of geopolitical strife. As cultural bridges strain under nationalist fervor, the industry faces a pivotal

question: can cinema transcend borders, or will it remain a casualty of division?