

Multiplexes want gap on films' release for DTH

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Multiplexes may push for an embargo of up to two weeks on Bollywood producers releasing their films on Direct-to-Home (DTH) television platforms, after the films hit the theatres.

This comes after a number of multiplexes complained of a drop in ticket sales after films like the Salman Khan starrer, *Main Aurr Mrs Khanna*, got released on DTH within five days of the theatrical release.

The release of new Hindi films on the DTH platforms almost simultaneously by film producers after the theatrical release has become a new point of issue between exhibitors and Bollywood producers after their two-month tussle in April-May that saw no new films come to theatres, causing an estimated loss of Rs 200 crore to the film industry.

"We are concerned at certain film producers

releasing big star-cast films on the DTH platform within a short time of the theatrical release. It is impacting the box office collections. We are going to discuss the matter with the producers," says Devang Sampat, COO, Cinemax, a leading multiplex operator in the country.

Multiplexes feel there is some urgency, as a number of good films are readying for theatrical release, starting October 30. These include *Alladin* (Amitabh Bachchan), *Ajab Prem Ki Ghazab Kahani* (Ranbir Kapoor, Katrina Kaif) and *3 Idiots* (Aamir Khan), among others that may go to DTH platforms within days of theatrical release. If that happens, the multiplexes stand to lose a substantial chunk of revenue to DTH operators.

Sources say the multiplexes are looking for a minimum of 10 days to two weeks before Bollywood producers release on DTH platforms. Several multiplexes, including PVR, Cinemax

and Fun Cinemas, will be talking to the association of Bollywood producers soon, sources say.

This happened after UTV, the producers of recent films like *Kaminey*, *What's Your Raashi* and *Main Aurr Mrs Khanna*, also released these on all private DTH platforms within a few days of their theatrical release. In retaliation, several multiplexes like Fun Cinemas and Cinemax stopped the screening of *Main Aurr Mrs Khanna* in theatres a few days earlier.

"There is a need to evaluate the business model attached to the DTH-release of new Hindi films. We are going to look at all the aspects of the matter, while discussing the matter with the Bollywood producers," says a senior executive of a leading multiplex chain who did not wish to be identified.

When asked, Siddharth Roy Kapoor, CEO, UTV Motion Pictures, declined to speak on the issue: "I do not wish to comment. But the



issue can be looked into, as it is a new revenue stream," Kapoor told *Business Standard*.

But Ajai Puri, CEO, Airtel Digital TV, the DTH service of Bharti Airtel, supports the Bollywood producers' move. "New Hindi films released on the DTH helps fight piracy. Also, it gives an access to people in smaller towns, where the new films hit the local single-screen theatres weeks and sometimes

months after their release in big cities," says Puri. Currently, there are over 16 million DTH subscribers in the country. This may go up to 20 million within the next six-10 months, experts say.

Therefore, a number of Bollywood producers are mulling releasing their films either directly on DTH platforms or within a short period after the theatrical release in order to make money.

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revenues for these films are minuscule compared to what theatres earn from their exhibition. "On an average, anywhere from 40,000 to 70,000 DTH subscribers order films at home. This is not more than Rs 50 lakh in revenue, which gets divided in a 50:50 ratio with the film producers. The numbers are minuscule in comparison to what the multiplexes make over a weekend," says a top executive of a DTH company.