

05.02.2007

[Homepage](#)[Submi](#)

E-GAZETTE

News  
Business  
Interviews  
Columnists  
Op-Ed  
Arts & Culture  
Book  
▶ Movie  
Theater  
Music  
Expat Zone  
Features  
Travel  
Leisure  
Life  
Weird But True  
Sports  
Turkish Press  
Review

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## Arts & Culture Movie

### A film industry flourishes in arid, ex-Soviet state Uzbekistan

A new film industry is on the rise in this ex-Soviet state: Dozens of inexpensive but profitable movies featuring pop divas and heart-wrenching plots. With their garish colors and low budgets, the films have Bollywood elements but with a twist reflecting Uzbekistan's long existence in Russia's shadow.

"They mostly combine Indian cinema and Russian drama story lines go on like in Bollywood, but usually with no happy endings," observed filmmaker Dmitri Korobkin.

The recent box-office hit titled "Romeo va Julietta" fits the pattern perfectly. Director Bakhrom Yakubov places Shakespeare's tragedy in modern-day Uzbekistan, an arid Central Asian country of 26 million, where Muslim traditions coexist with Western influences and Soviet legacy. The main characters, renamed Rovshan and Jamilya, come from two rich households. Following the Bollywood standards of decency, the star-crossed lovers never share a kiss, let alone a bed. Rovshan is on the run after killing the Tybalt character, and a vigilant policeman fatally wounds him when he approaches the hospital where Jamilya is treated after faking a suicide attempt.

Comedy fans flocked to a rare Uzbek film with a happy ending Rustam Sagdiev's "Pushy Daughter-in-Law." In the film, a chic big-city girl falls for a student from a parochial hamlet, where Muslim values are strong and tank tops on women are frowned upon. The student rejects her charms and returns home after graduation, but the girl shows up at his doorstep only to enrage his strict mother with improper outfits and reluctance to tend cows.

The rest is also Shakespearean, the taming of the shrew ends with a wedding feast. At least 30 films have been made in Uzbekistan in 2006, said TV-film producer Ruben Arzumanov compared to 20 in 2005 and a handful for most of the chaotic 1990s that followed the 1991 Soviet breakup. The boom began in the wake of a flop.

"Tamerlane," a government-sponsored epic about a medieval Muslim conqueror now lauded as the founding father of the Uzbek state, took years to produce and cost millions of dollars \_ only to fail at the box office after its 2003 release.

The failure marked the collapse of Uzbekfilm, a state-run film studio founded in 1925 by the Soviet government eager to promote Communist ideology among Muslims of Central Asia. Now a new generation of film directors grounded in advertising, music and even wedding videos has emerged. Equipped with digital cameras (often rented) and Adobe software (always pirated), they don't need expensive celluloid film and editing facilities.

"All of a sudden, everyone's got a talent to make movies," said Bakhodir Yuldashev, one of the founders of Markaz TV, Uzbek music television.

"They are after easy money, not art."

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Tashkent AP

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