

Watching 'Jinnah' in a lounge set

* * By Asif Noorani * *

The invitation to what was billed as the 'Premiere of Jinnah in Pakistan' was issued by the Jinnah Society and the venue was the Governor House in Karachi. A dress code was mentioned in fine print: lounge suit or national dress. Those who

read it were wondering since when have invitees to film premieres been bound by dress codes? Those who didn't read the fine print were better off, because that evening the refreshing Karachi breeze was conspicuous by its absence. Like most of the local artistes who appeared in the movie the breeze didn't perhaps get an invitation. There were hardly five or six journalists among the invitees but the socialites and glitterati of the city were in profusion.

Then there was another departure from the normal premieres — a dinner, catered by one of the five-star hotels of the city. The Jinnah Society hosted the dinner and Liaquat Merchant claimed that in view of the recent cyclone in Badin and Thatta districts a part of the amount that was to be spent on making the dinner lav-

Jameel Dehlvi receiving his award from the Governor of Sindh



Photo by Fahim Siddiqi

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Akbar S. Ahmad was as usual articulate. There were also awards given by the Jinnah Society.

One or two cricket enthusiasts among the audience paid visits to the parking lot where some of the chauffeurs were keeping themselves abreast with the exciting match between the tournament favourites South Africa and the lowly-rated Zimbabwe. David was strangling his hold on Goliath.

The *piece-de-resistance* of the evening was the movie itself. While making *Jinnah*, which is not a feature film in the traditional sense, the executive producer and the director used the

unusual technique of unravelling the plots through vignettes. It was like a painting comprising mosaics. The screenplay was akin to the plot of an episodic novel. In short, the technique was refreshingly different. It would have lost its impact had the editing not been brilliant.

The photography was splendid, too. The stock shots from the tragic events of 1947 were restored thanks to the advancement in technology. The background score achieved its objective — it heightened the impact of the scenes.

Christopher Lee silenced his critics

by putting up a fine performance. He lent dignity to the character of the highly dignified person he was portraying. Shashi Kapoor was convincing, too. There were no poor performances. Even those who made cameo appearances were quite good and they had to be because the director relied on some of our competent stage and TV performer. The dramatis personae were well crafted, but with one glaring exception. The character of Liaquat Ali Khan, played by Shakeel, was misleading, to say the least. He was painted almost as a villain. Liaquat, at one point, says that he feels like slapping Mountbatten and on another occasion he suggests to the Quaid that Nehru and Lady Mountbatten be blackmailed since he had their letters in his possession. *Jinnah*, on both occasions, snubs Liaquat. There was no sense in elevating the Father of the Nation by degrading his most trusted lieutenants. This is one

Between You & Me

ish was donated to the cyclone relief fund. But the concept of lavishness being subjective, this columnist didn't quite agree with Mr Merchant. Be that as it may, the spread was awesome. But there is no such thing as a free lunch or even a free dinner. Between the meal and the movie there were speeches and quite long drawn at that.





'Jinnah'

flaw in the film and not a minor one at that.

The film-maker should be given full marks for presenting two sides of the picture. If the Muslims were massacred at the time of Partition, so were Hindus and Sikhs. Jameel Dehlvi and Akbar Ahmed cleared the misunderstandings about Mr Jinnah, created by his opponents and by some of his supporters. He was no fundamentalist. He made it clear that the country belonged as much to the minorities as it did to the Muslim majority. Also, the human side of the man was depicted in no uncertain terms. The movie *Jinnah* was no knee-jerk response to Attenborough's *Gandhi*, which vilified the character of the Founder of Pakistan. It was a truthful portrayal of the man who was pushed into Partition by some of the obdurate leaders of the Congress party. And yet he was no narrow-minded leader who achieved his objective without resorting to unconstitutional methodology.
