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Apollo treat for the movie buff

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Mumbai, Nov. 22: The Apollo group is betting big on digital movies. It is planning to set up the largest chain of digital theatres in the world by 2007 in India.

Apollo International's arm UFO Moviez will set up the theatres.

The plan is to set up 500 digital cinema halls by mid-2006 at an investment of Rs 80 crore and then scale it up to 2000 theatres at a cost of Rs 300 crore.

UFO Moviez is a division of Aluabale Media Pvt Ltd, which is a subsidiary of Apollo International Ltd. Apollo is the unlisted company in the group.

The technology, billed as the next great leap in film distribution and exhibition, delivers digitally mastered

movie images through satellite directly to cinema halls. It will facilitate a widespread release of any film without any additional cost in prints.

Cinema halls, however, have to possess a satellite dish to receive the movie and a digital projector to screen it. It can also convert a movie from the current optical prints or the analog format into a digital format at a cost of Rs 1 lakh.

The technology is expected to remove crucial drawbacks associated with the current form of screening movies in theatres.

While the traditional cinema projectors require big rectifiers that consumes huge electricity, digital cinema saves close to 40,000 kva of electricity annually, said UFO Moviez officials.

Moreover, due to the high



Apollo group chairman and MD Onkar S. Kanwar (right) with Bollywood director Yash Chopra in Mumbai on Tuesday. (Fotocorp)

cost of optical prints at Rs 50,000-60,000 per print, distributors and producers rarely release a film in more than 100 cinemas simultaneously.

As a result, distributors

delay releasing films in B and C class cities, by which time piracy takes away 50 per cent of the market.

Digital cinema will solve these problems as it can relay

a movie in as many as 200 halls, officials added.

Raaja Kanwar, managing director of Apollo International, said while the size of the Indian film industry as percentage of the country GDP is put at 0.67 per cent, it is expected to grow at a robust rate of 18 per cent annually over the next five years. Its share of organised production houses will cross 55 per cent from the present 20 per cent.

Speaking to **The Telegraph**, Kanwar said the venture has succeeded in introducing the concept to many in the industry and has installed more than 100 digital theatres in the country in the first few months of its operation.

The company has received business enquiries from Europe, Russia, Mauritius, US and the Far East, he added.