

Housefull!

98pc of cinemagoers in Bahrain are from Saudi: top official

DT News Network Manama

As the clerics in the neighbouring Saudi Arabia were warning citizens about the 'depravity' of cinemas and music concerts, it turns out that they were actually enjoying action flicks on the silver screens in Bahrain.

This is according to the opinion of a top Saudi official, who told Saudi newspaper *Al-Hayat*, in an interview, that the greater majority of cinemagoers in Bahrain are from Saudi Arabia.

Ahmed Al Mulla, Saudi Film Festival Director also said that this is unique considering the fact that Saudis are also visiting other destinations in the region including Egypt and Dubai with the same intention.



Representational image

"But these higher percentages are recorded only in Bahrain," he pointed out.

According to him, around 98 per cent of cinemagoers in Bahrain are from Saudi Arabia, where entertainment does not

enjoy the highest priority.

"I learned about this trend from some of my friends in the showbiz in Bahrain," said Al Mulla adding that art is important for human beings and its absence will "turn them

into monsters".

This new statistics should be read along with the recent statement by Khalid al-Falih, the oil minister of Saudi, that the government there is considering opening cinemas.

"The extremist religious idea must be eradicated from the cultural situation, not just from cinema but from music, sculpture and other art forms," Al Mulla said while stressing that culture and arts in the kingdom have been criminalised for 30 years.

"We were demanding to alleviate this fierce attitude before it harms the country, but no one listened," said Al Mulla.

Saudis are voracious consumers of online videos and rank among the world's top viewers of YouTube.

Of late, talks about reopening cinema halls have gained great mileage in the kingdom where now private film screenings are also held. In fact, Saudi Arabia has created a

government agency to support private firms organising entertainment events, under a wide-ranging "Vision 2030" plan for economic and social reform.

However, Saudi Arabia's highest-ranking cleric warned in January of the "depravity" of cinemas and music concerts.

Many have predicted that cinemas will reopen there soon, especially after the formation of the General Authority for Entertainment, which re-allowed organising music concerts, which were not possible earlier.

A Bahraini official recently revealed that the Bahrain Cinema Company (Cineco) has been requested to study the possibilities of establishing cinema halls in Saudi Arabia.



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