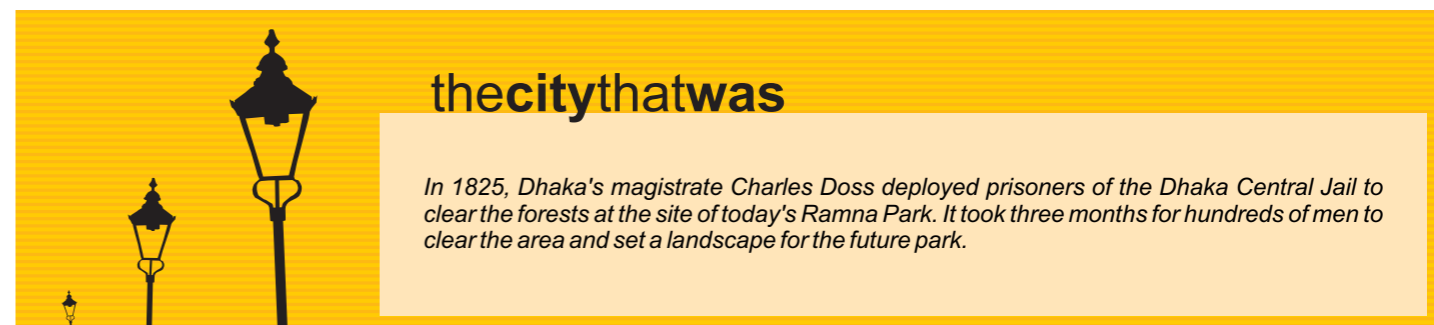




Star city

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DHAKA SUNDAY JUNE 1, 2003



thecitythatwas

In 1825, Dhaka's magistrate Charles Doss deployed prisoners of the Dhaka Central Jail to clear the forests at the site of today's Ramna Park. It took three months for hundreds of men to clear the area and set a landscape for the future park.

Cinema-goers staying home

The film industry suffers as audiences dwindle

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

Film audiences are slowly but surely turning their backs on the cinema halls that were once a vibrant and colourful component of the city's cultural identity.

Poor picture quality, influx of cable TV, vulgarity and rampant pirating have caused a distinct dip in the popularity of Bangla movies. Although the city's rich and middle-classes had long abandoned their trips to the halls, the theatres still thrived on the poor and working classes that would flock to the stands for cheap entertainment and escapism. But now even that section of the audience is failing to show up in numbers.

As a result, the 38 cinema halls of Dhaka are facing the threat of gradual extinction. Many cinemas, including the historic Gulistan, have already had to shut down, and even traditionally successful ones like Jonaki and Modhumita are reportedly contemplating closure.

Recently, artists, directors and producers of the country's film industry demonstrated in the city to raise awareness and to draw attention of the government towards their plight. Showing solidarity with the movement, hall owners of Dhaka, Narayanganj and Tongi enforced a token strike by not screening films at their special and matinee shows on May 21.

The protest was specifically directed against pirated CDs of movies – which allow almost immediate viewing of just-released Bangla films – and adult films on satellite channels.

Producers allege that films are mostly

recorded and copied from cinemas outside the city and then distributed in the market or transmitted by cable TV operators.

"As people can now enjoy the latest local releases in the comfort of their homes, they don't feel like going to the movies anymore," said film director Ali Azad.

The absence of stringent laws to curb piracy and copyright violation is also believed to be encouraging those who are involved in the illegal film business, but the core of the problem lies with the low standard of filmmaking.

The so-called 'social' movies, which are a mixture of romance, fighting, song and dance and invariably have a happy ending, had until recently enjoyed popularity among the audience, a majority of whom were women. But producers are becoming increasingly reluctant to continue making such films as illegal screening have made them commercial flops. Instead, they are going for the cheaper 'band-aid' films, which guarantee an excess of sexuality, perversion and crude dialogue.

These second-rate films are devoid of any proper story, technical excellence or basic movie-making syntax. The philosophy is simple – luring the spectators with an unrestrained display of flesh. A sexually explicit scene from a different film or source, which is known as a 'cut piece,' is edited into the original movie after it has passed the censor board.

"A band-aid film can be made with a budget of Tk 40-50 lakhs whereas a social movie costs at least Tk one crore. We are only doing this to survive. You have to remember that the livelihood of around ten lakh people revolves around the film industry," said a producer on condition of anonymity.

However, this trend is having a negative impact on the halls.

"About 80 percent of Bangla film's audience were women. But they are not coming anymore due to the tastelessness of the movies. We are also losing the family groups," said Nazrul Islam, exhibitor of Jonaki cinema hall.

Allegations abound that the producers of band-aids bribe the censor board officials into releasing the cut-pieces. "In some cases, censor inspectors even blackmail the makers of clean films saying that their tapes won't get censor board certificates unless they pay them a certain amount of money. I have seen many producers harassed in this way," claimed a producer also not wishing to be named.

The monopoly of the Bangladesh Film Development Centre (BFDC) over marketing of the movies is another case for grievance among the activists of the ailing industry. Cable operators too are facing their wrath for airing the latest English and Hindi blockbusters. But some feel that developing a cinema-going culture is the only way out of this situation even if it means promoting foreign movies to a certain extent.

"Our film industry has been hijacked. People who are seeing the high quality of foreign films on satellite TV can't possibly have any attraction left for homegrown movies. To address this crisis, we need to import good Hindi and English films. That would encourage people of all walks of society to return to cinema halls first and eventually it could lead to a resurgence of Bangla films of taste," opined Managing Director of Modhumita Movies Iftekharuddin Naushad.



Cinemas are forced to screen lewd films to draw audiences.

Police motorcycles backfire



Imported police motorcycles are falling apart in less than a year.

SULTANA RAHMAN

The 115 new motorcycles used by the city's traffic sergeants have been falling apart within six months of their use, according to the Traffic Department.

Each of these motorcycles cost the exchequer Tk 2.5 lakh through borrowed money from the World Bank. In less than one year, 34 out of 115 of these motorbikes were lying inactive in the police workshops at Rajarbagh.

Sources said, Dhaka Transport Coordination Board (DTCB) last year bought 115 motor cycles at a cost of Tk 262.48 crore for the traffic department. The traffic sergeants are extremely unhappy with these motorcycles as they are stalling frequently on the road, and they often have to repair them from their own pockets.

The Rajarbagh police workshop sent a letter to DTCB at the start of this month mentioning that, a year after their

purchase, the motorcycles did not work properly because of their 'extremely fragile sub-standard parts.' Moreover, the unavailability of those parts in this country is causing the cycles to lie unrepaired and unused in the workshop.

Traffic sergeants who use them claim that the motorcycles are not useful at all. Many parts are damaged frequently, and they are often concerned when riding that an accident might occur because of the motorcycle's complete collapse. "Bicycles are even built better than that," said one sergeant.

Officials of the Traffic Department also agreed that the bikes were not useful at all. Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) sources said, in most cases, the chains, glass plates, halogen tubes, signal lights and sirens are damaged almost immediately.

Sources said, DTCB bought the motorcycles without any inspection or checking whether spare parts were available in the country.

Meanwhile, DTCB officials have alleged that the parts were damaged due to lack of

proper maintenance by the police department. Moreover, the police authorities did not report any problems with the bikes. If they did, then DTCB could take initiatives to follow up the warranty.

The warranty was valid for one year and in this period the manufacturer was responsible for manufacture and equipment problems. AAC Traders, an import business, imported the bikes from China. AAC traders also imports for military troops including army and navy.

Md Nasir, director of AAC Traders said that they imported the motorbikes as per the tender conditions. Authorities did not report any problem with the bikes during the warranty period that includes manufacture problem.

Sangsad area richer by four acres

Social Welfare Ministry hands over four acres of land

MORSHED ALI KHAN

The Sangsad Bhaban area in the Sher-e-Bangla Nagar is now richer by 4.6 acres of land. The Ministry of Social Welfare handed back the land, by Mirpur Road near Asad Gate, to the Sangsad area by removing three large structures that housed an institute for the deaf and dumb since 1958. The hand-over took place in January this year and the demolition work of the old structures is now underway.

Officials of the Public Works Department (PWD) at Sangsad Bhaban said that the area would be included in the actual landscape of the 217-acre national parliament complex. They said that the entire

area would be elevated by landfill and leveled with the southern open space in front of the parliament building.

"So far we do not know what the government might do with the large plot that we have recovered," said a PWD engineer requesting not to be named.

Although local people said that the government is planning to build 'the largest mosque in the world' on the site, PWD officials at Sangsad Bhaban office denied having any such scheme 'at the moment'. A resident of Lalmatia, who regularly walks around the Sangsad area said that he had heard from the officials that they would enact a '20 feet high wall' along Mirpur Road.

The PWD is the official custodian

of the Sangsad Bhaban area. Its officials said that in exchange for the land at the parliament complex, they had given the social welfare ministry a chunk of land in the Agargaon area for reconstruction of the institute for deaf and dumb.

Sources in the PWD said that the government had once planned to build the Institute of Parliamentary Studies (IPS) at the same site. They said that due to a crisis of funds, the project could not be launched.

"The IPS complex is not included in the original Master Plan done by Louis H Kahn," said the official requesting anonymity. "Our initial job is to develop the 4.6 acres and set it up with the remaining landscape of the Sangsad Bhaban area," he said.

Town Planners and architects

said that any unplanned plantation of trees could not only spoil the landscape but also provide shelter for crime and unsocial activities.

"On the northern side of the same plot, authorities have planted a dense thicket of trees. The area is now notorious for drug-use and prostitution," said a member of the Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB).

After they level the area up, they should consult landscape experts and keep the area open and visible from outside so that people traveling on Mirpur Road can have a look at the open space from outside, added the architect.

hello dhaka

Int'l Radio Timetable
VOA, SW (m)
0730-0800: 16.87, 19.72, 25.4
2230-2300: 25.1, 31.3, 41.1 MW 190.5 (m)
Both sessions available in 97.6 MHz in FM
BBC (All sessions available in FM 100 MHz)
0630-0700: 49, 31, 25 mb
1400-1410: 25, 19, 13 mb
1930-2000: 41, 31, 25
2230-2300: 49, 41, 31 mb



New addition of land to the parliament complex.

Star Holiday announcement

The contest to Fly and Win Free Holiday in London sponsored by The Daily Star and British Airways ended on May 31. For convenience of those who flew on the last date, the original coupon, duly filled in, can be dropped till June 15 at The Daily Star office, the British Airways Checkin Desk at ZIA or at British Airways town office.