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## Down to Earth

### Dwindling Cinegoers in City

By ASM Nurunnabi

From a recent news report, it is learnt that the Dhaka city's cinema halls are at present faced with a critical situation on account of dwindling numbers of movie viewers. The situation has lately taken such a bad turn that, as compared with last year, the number has almost halved. The quarters concerned in the film industry now feel extremely uneasy over this development. For this they blame the TV satellite-channels.

During the period spanning from the 40s to 60s, family members from the educated middle and elite classes used to go to cinema halls to enjoy feature films produced in Bombay, Calcutta, UK and Hollywood. At that time, good films were made because, among other factors, movie scripts were based on the writings of eminent authors like Herman Melville, Ernest Hemingway, and Tolstoy, which gave such memorable films like Moby Dick, For Whom the Bell Tolls and War and Peace. The audience in those days were discerning in their cultural tastes leading them to appreciate the creations of great movie directors like David Lean (Lawrence of Arabia), Kurosawa (Roshomon) and Satyajit Ray (Mahanagar).

At present the movies telecast by the satellite channels have turned TV rooms into mini cinema halls for many viewers. As a result, about 10 lakh people connected with film industry are now reportedly under threat of losing their source of living. From sources in the producers and exhibitors' associations, it is

learnt that out of 46 show houses that are licensed to operate in Dhaka, five have already been closed down. In the Dhaka film industry, a good number of filmmakers have reportedly remained inactive on account of a dull period in the industry due to a significant fall in the number of movie-goers. The downward trend in the interest of film viewers has caused concern among film producers and film exhibitors who feel that such a drastic fall in their business never occurred in the past.

To deal with the present prevailing critical situation, a 21-member committee has reportedly been formed with representatives from relevant areas of the film industry. The committee members solely blamed the TV satellite channels for the lack of cinegoers' interest in the locally produced feature films.

According to observers, the slide in Bangladesh films began from the early 80s when too much emphasis was laid on earning quick money by capitalising on the physical aspects of the heroines rather than their acting abilities. The action and adventure films produced by the local producers were of a poor standard portraying a childish mimicry of violent fights, leaving bad examples for our youths.

These may be some of the reasons causing disgust among some viewers of local films and keeping them away from the cinema halls. On the other hand, the satellite channels offer a variety of Bangla films telecast everyday, some of which may not

be of questionable quality. The committee which has been constituted to safeguard the interests of the local film industry, directed its grievances against the ETV channel, in particular, through which two Bangla films are regularly telecast everyday. When one of such films is shown on the channel from noon, it is said to affect the attendance of the school students, particularly in the rural areas, who desert their classes to view the Bangla films. The prohibition by the teachers and the guardians has reportedly produced little effects in dissuading the students in this regard.

Bangla commercial filmmakers have, therefore, demanded of the government to take necessary steps to save their industry from the hegemony of the satellite channels. Viewers reportedly favour watching such channels for Bangla films telecast at prime times, particularly during weekly holidays when some highly popular films are shown.

In the opinion of observers, there are, of course, flaws in the city's cinema halls which discourage the viewers to go there for entertainment. Among such flaws they mention the declining standard of film along with poor environment both inside and outside the cinema halls as important factors in causing among the general run of movie viewers. The video cassette culture and the satellite and cable TV have helped them find an alternative.



Wading through knee-deep water and perhaps heading for relief centre, these people in Satkhira's Kolaroa abandoned their dwellings as floodwaters showed no sign of retreat (left); the photo on the right taken by Md. Kamrul Arefin depicts the misery of flood victims at makeshift shelters at Damurhuda Health Complex in Chuadanga -- Star photos

### Opposition plans protest during PM's stopover in London

The four-party alliance led by BNP will stage a demonstration during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's stopover in London on October 15 on her way to USA, reports UNB.

Hasina is scheduled to make a daylong stopover in London and is expected to address a meeting of Bangladesh expatriates at Camden Centre.

Opposition leaders and workers are planning the demonstration to press for voting rights of the Bangladesh expatriates, trial of Surat Mia killing and various demands of the 4-party alliance, according to a fax message received in Dhaka yesterday.

It was decided at a joint meeting of UK branch of BNP and Jatiya Party at Cable Street in East London on Tuesday. Another meeting of the opposition will be held on Sunday.

Mohiur Rahman, the UK branch BNP president, said they are going to stage the demonstration on different issues to draw attention of the world community as 'the democratic rule in Bangladesh is now under threat'.

### Pabna does go on strike from today

PABNA, Oct 6: Doctors of the district have called for an indefinite strike from tomorrow protesting attack on one of their colleagues in the town Wednesday night, reports UNB.

Bangladesh Medical Association (BMA) Pabna unit in an emergency meeting Thursday announced the strike for injuring Medical Officer of Pabna General Hospital, Dr Amin Ahmed Khan, by a group of assailants.

The meeting condemned the attack and resented failure of police to arrested alleged terror Biplab, 20, who led the attack.

All hospitals and private clinics except their emergency sections will remain closed during strike.

BMA sources said the strike would continue until arrest of Biplab.

Injured Amin Ahmed Khan was admitted to Pabna General Hospital from where he was shifted to Ibm Sina Clinic in Dhaka as his condition deteriorated.

### Young man shot dead in city

By Staff Correspondent

Miscreants shot dead a young man inside Kalabagan staff quarters in the city's Dhanmondi area early morning yesterday.

Zahirul Islam Sharif, 20, was shot in his chest at about 5:30 am when he was on his way to a mosque located inside the staff quarter for prayers. When he arrived in front of House number 3, a bullet hit him in the chest, killing him on the spot.

"Zahir, a student of class ten of Sukrabad School, was well-behaved and he was not involved in any anti-social activities," police said.

He might have been caught in a crossfire of two rival groups or could have been mistaken for a rival by criminals, local people said.

Police recovered the body of the student and sent it to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy. Police could find the reason behind the killing immediately.

The victim's father Nur Nabi, an employee of PWD, filed a case with Dhanmondi police accusing unidentified people.

### BR to lease out commercial activities of 29 more trains

By Raziur Rahman

Bangladesh Railway has planned to lease out to private sector commercial activities of 29 more trains in another 13 routes because of its 'success' in such venture earlier, BR sources said.

Previously, BR had leased out commercial activities of 21 trains in 11 routes and it led to a 'remarkable increase' in its income in those routes.

BR carries about 36 million passengers in different routes in the country annually and it started involving private sector in this field in July 1997. First it leased out commercial activities of one train in Dhaka-Narayanganj route on an experimental basis and gradually that of nine more trains in the route.

The monthly income of those trains rose to Tk 8.51 lakh on an average from Tk 2.92 lakh after those were 'licensed out', the sources pointed out.

Besides, commercial activities of 11 trains in 10 routes were licensed out to private sector from February last year to May this year. "While BR is operating on loss, all the trains in the 11 routes are making good profit," a railway official said.

The following is an estimate of BR's earning from some of the trains before and after the lease:

Train	Route	Monthly earning before leasing out	Monthly earning after leasing out
Titas Commuter	Dhaka-B'Baria	15 lakh	20.74 lakh
Surma Mail	Dhaka-Sylhet	7 lakh	9.63 lakh
Balaka Express	Dhaka-Mymensing	7.5 lakh	11.70 lakh
Padmarag Express	Santahar-Lalmoinirhat	1.74 lakh	9.78 lakh
481/482 Local	Santahar-Lalmoinirhat	3 lakh	7.62 lakh
Rocket Express	Kulna-Parbatipur	8.40 lakh	14.40 lakh
Chilahati Express	Parbatipur-Chilahati	1.35 lakh	3.60 lakh
Uttara Express	Rajshai-Parbatipur	5 lakh	15.30 lakh

BR has so far involved private sector in commercial activities like ticket selling, ticket checking and cleaning of compartments of local and mail trains.

Private sector has also been given responsibility of 'on board' catering services in five inter-city trains so far and such services in two more inter-city trains would be given handed over to private sector shortly, an official said.

"Not only increase in income, satisfaction and comfort of passengers are also prompting BR to involve private sector in more routes," he said.

Of the 29 trains now under BR's privatisation plan, 20 pairs are in seven routes in its East zone and nine in its six West zone.

When contacted, a high official of BR admitted that 'dishonesty and corruption' of BR men were responsible for poor earning in those routes.

According to the news scan database report of January-June this year by Transparency International Bangladesh, BR is the 'most corrupt department in the communication sector.'

### Lalon's shrine threatened

By Morshed Ali Khan, back from Kushtia

Authorities in Kushtia has filled up 13 acres of the historic Kaliganga river, chopped down a dozen trees and stripped an 80-year-old mango tree of its large branches to build a four-storied complex within ten feet of Lalon's shrine.

The project has already created controversy and has largely divided a community living by the spiritualism of Lalon, one of the greatest folk philosophers and poets of the region who died 109 years ago at the age of 117.

While the Lalon Academy and the district administration officials insist that the project will not spoil the natural landscape or the traditional values of the shrine, many question the motive for construction of the 500-seat auditorium as part of the project within the seven bigha (about 2.1 acre) area where Lalon and his followers have been buried.

Some officials of the Lalon Academy condemned the decision to build the four-storied structure within ten feet of the shrine and said that it would destroy the traditional values of the shrine. Every year, during the Bangla months of Kartik and Falgun, thousands of sadhus and Lalon admirers camp at the site singing Lalon's songs.

"The sadhus definitely do not want to be confined to a modern auditorium and perform. So the decision to build it will only serve to divert from Lalon's traditional values to a so-called modern theme," said an official of the Lalon Academy requesting anonymity. He said such a building within the premises of the shrine is totally unnecessary and it is sure to destroy the beauty and tranquility of the area.

Tajul Ali Khan, Secretary of the 900-member Lalon Academy defended the 3.64 crore taka project that is being implemented to construct the four-storied complex within ten feet of the shrine. The building, designed by architects of the Public Works Department, will accommodate the auditorium, administration wing of the academy, a library, a museum and a rest house for guests. The ground floor will be kept open.

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