thecitythatwas

Dhaka Central Jail was set up, it is assumed in the early 19th century during the East India Company rule. Central jail prisoners worked as labourers when Saint Thomas' church was built around 1820. Documents of 1833 state the then Dhaka jail could accommodate 800 prisoners. On an average there were 526 prisoners a day, from different areas of the then East

Modhumita Movies heads towards closedown

Lack of security and traffic jams prevent people coming to the movie theatre. Constant restriction on importing movies from neighbouring countries did not prove a protection for the local film industry as the government thought

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

A famous celluloid screen is apparently heading towards closedown because of a slump in business 37 years into entertain-

"My wife was entranced by the movie we saw on the 70mm screen and I was happy watching her enthralled," Hasan Sharif, a retired government official, recalled sweet memories about Modhumita Movies. He took his newlywed bride to the cinema hall on a moonlit night.

Like Hasan, many derived entertainment from Modhumita Movies, one of the oldest cinema halls in the city, established on December 1, 1967.

From the first opening show with 'Dakbabu' and first public show with 'Cleopatra', the cinema hall screened hundreds of to continue. He said it would be more profitable if the 1,221-seat theatre at the commercial heart of the capital is transferred into a multi-storey building.

"Modhumita did not stick to its old setting and has changed over time to meet the demand of new generation," Naushad said, referring to the first ever Dolby Surround Sound System in Bangladesh, installed in Modhumita in 1997 and Digital Theatre System (DTS) in 1999.

"Unfortunately we cannot entertain people despite such equipment as quality films are not available," he said.

"People do not turn up to watch those sleazy films," Naushad said blaming the lowquality movies on the downward trend in business. Lack of security and traffic jam prevent people coming to the movie theatre, he



good Bangla movies and all-time

Hollywood blockbusters. "We have been trying to survive amid continuous loss in the business. But how long can we

struggle," said M Iftekharuddin

Naushad, managing director of

Modhumita Movies. Naushad said the authorities have not vet taken the final decision but there is the least chance said. Also, video piracy and foreign satellite channels added to

The managing director said some good films were made immediately after independence but the trend did not last long. Now creativity has yielded to vulgarity in the film industry in Bangladesh. "What else can I expect when I see my former

peons and ticket checkers have become film producers?" he said.

He believes constant restriction on importing movies from neighbouring countries did not prove a protection for the local film industry as the government

He said it is high time the government thought of allowing them. "I think it will ensure good quality of movies as there would be strong competition then. Also, the government would have more

tax," he said. Asked, Naushad said Modhumita could not make any profit for the last six months. "Earlier, we used to make good profit by screening Bangla movies for 52 weeks a year while American movies attracted people for 30 weeks," he said.

"But now even English movies cannot help make profit as people watch the new English movies in video. Also, the cable operators show those movies in their private movie channels," he added.

PHOTOS: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

On why Modhumita does not screen brand new English movies, the managing director said it became too expensive to import

them. Pirated prints of English movies are widely smuggled into cinema halls. "I was surprised to see a cinema hall in Narayanganj screening "True Lies". How could they get hold of the print while Modhumita movies are the sole agent of Paramount Picture, Universal Studio and 20th

Century Fox," he said. He said he brings movies from abroad paying a large amount along with tax but smuggled copies are freely available.

A number of cinema halls discontinued their business in the last few years. Naushad pointed to Gulistan, Mallika, Beauty, Jyoti, Tajmahal, Rupmahal and Naz that closed down, along with at least 10 cinema halls out of 15 in Chittagong.

At a glance

Established: 1967 Inaugurated: December 1, 1967 Staff: Around 100 Opening Movie: Dakbabu First Public Show: Cleopatra Total Seats: 1221 Dress Circle: 326 Rear Stall: 599 Front: 296 Size of the screen: 70mm Installed Dolby Surround Sound System in 1997 Digital Theatre System: 1999

Modhumita's hit movie

Roaring Fire Enter the Dragon Siddharta One Million Years B.C. First Blood Shogun's Ninga Dawn of Girls Mackanas Gold Benhur 5 Man Army Two Women Where Angels Dare **Guns of Navarone** The Towering Inferno **Bombay Talkies** Helen of Troy The Dirty Dozen Operation Day Break The Wild Bunch Yesterday Today and Tomorrow Raiders of the Lost Part Commando Cliffhanger Titanic

Golden Eye Jurassic Park

Desperado

The X- Files The Lost World

The World is not Enough Saving Private Ryan Mission Impossible 2

The Mask of Zorrow Baby's Day Out Pearl Harbour

Sraban Megher Din Dui Duari

Padma Nadir Majhi Matir Moyna Moner Majhe Tumi

Hason Raja Bou Shashurir Juddha



Modhumita, pioneer in big screen movies, has been trying to survive in the business amid continuing loss. But for how long can the struggle go on, ponders the authorities of cinema hall, although no final decision on its existence has been yet taken.

woes of cinema hall owners.

Down memory lane...

Shubhash Dutta

Subhash Dutta, a veteran film director, expressed grief at the probable closedown of Modhumita Movies. "I remember the day my famous movie Abirbhab was released in Modhumita." he said. "It was a super hit movie that was screened for long. The house was full at each show."

"I have seen numerous movies in that theatre," he recollected his early days. "I am still a regular viewer of films in Modhumita. I have seen a movie there as recently as Saturday," he said, adding the atmosphere of the cinema hall is decent.

Dutta regretted the glum mood of the film industry. "A number of cinema halls in the city have closed down. More owners will follow suit. Maybe they will turn cinema halls into warehouses," he

"Ticket touts once lived on sales on the black market. But it is impossible now, as people do not opt for watching movies," he said.

"It may be influence of low-quality movies, videos and cable network, but

people's attitude towards cinema halls has changed.

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

Abdullah Abu Sayeed

"We have sweet memories about this prestigious theatre," said Abdullah Abu Saveed, founder of Bishwa Sahitya Kendra. He recalled the time he spent with his friends in the theatre.

"Watching a movie was a festival. We never needed any excuse of festivities for it." he said.

"We lost the festival mood long ago." Sayeed said the last time he went to Modhumita was to watch famous Hollywood movie "Brave Heart". He said most people these days do

not go to movie theatre but prefer to watch videos at home. But it never gives you the same feeling as watching movies on the large screen," Sayeed said. Fun and enjoyment are never the same on the large

"Sometimes I feel like watching a cinema on big screen and that would be the time to make me more nostalgic for Modhumita," he said.

