

# National Theatre Stage leaves a lot to be desired

ERSHAD KAMOL

Ever since independence, amateur theatre practitioners in the city have been staging plays without a proper theatre. The most popular theatre venue of the country, the Mahila Samity Auditorium, was not built for staging plays, but designed for organising seminars and symposiums. Thus, the recently inaugurated National Theatre Stage has given fresh hope to theatre activists.

The first phase of the proposed Tk 38 crore project has been completed with an expenditure of only Tk 51.36 lakh. Under this phase, three centrally air-conditioned modern auditoriums - the National Theatre Stage, the National Art Gallery and the National Dance & Music Centre have been constructed with modern lighting and sound systems.

plans in the second phase to include other facilities befitting of a world class theatre.

But while the exterior of the National Theatre Stage is bound to impress anyone, the excitement gradually evaporates as soon as a show starts.

Because of the faulty opening of the proscenium arch stage, the audience on the first floor of the gallery sees only half of the cyclorama (the curtain used at the back of the stage). As a result they miss the lighting effects on the cyclorama. This situation has occurred because of the inappropriate height and width ratio of the opening. While the width of the opening is 78 feet, the height is only about 20 feet.

A workshop for 15 light designers of the country was held under the expertise of an expatriate designer. The practical classes of that workshop took place at the National Theatre Stage and light designers were told that an ideal set up would

have the light source at a 45-degree angle facing the performers. But at present, none of the light bars follow that basic requirement. On the other hand, seven light bars have been set for the stage. As a result the FoH (Front of House) bar is too far from the stage while the Last Bar is too close to the cyclorama.

"The FoH bar is so far from the stage that it is really tough to set a general light wash at this hall. Moreover, lights fluctuate every now and then. I think after changing the light bar set-up, the academy should appoint an expert to train technicians so that they can operate modern equipment properly," said renowned director Tariq Anam Khan after the staging of *Projapati* at the hall.

Masking of the stage is not proper too. Instead of the angular wings setting, it has been set straight. Because of that, a backstage activity during a play is visible to the audience sitting at the corners. The drop lights of the light bar act as obstacle

to the viewers because of the faulty masking. The colour of the intermediate curtain is yellow, which is also not convenient for light designing.

"The acoustic system of the hall is excellent but the other systems are not in keeping with this excellence. Ratio of the width and height of the opening of the proscenium arch is not proper. Masking of the stage is not good at all. Last bar that should be about five feet from the cyclorama is only one and a half feet away, destroying the colour effect on the cyclorama. The light distribution of the dimmer is not proper too. Only 120 lights among the 300 can be operated by the dimmer," said designer and director of the play *Brand*, Kamaluddin Nilu.

The modern sound system is not working properly. Sometimes during a show annoying static sound is created.

"No skilled hand is available at the Shilpakala Academy to



A view of the new look of the National Theatre Hall of the Shilpakala Academy, while inset shows the completed stage and auditorium.

handle the sound system," added Nilu.

"The floor of the stage is so shiny that light reflecting on the floor creates a bouncing light effect on the cyclorama

which is harmful for the light effects," said Mahmudul Islam Selim, a set and light designer of Nagorik Natyangan.

Cultural activists think that the Shilpakala Academy should

address the problems before taking over the responsibility of National Theatre Stage from the Public Works Department (PWD) to avoid repetition of problems like the one experi-

enced on the second day of weeklong drama festival arranged by the Theatre Art Unit where the hydraulic lift of the orchestra totally broke down.



The damaged Dhaka-Narayanganj road is a constant cause for slow movement and congestion of traffic.

## The ailing Dhaka-Narayanganj road

FAIZUL KHAN TANIM

The condition of the Dhaka-Narayanganj road via Postagola and Pagla has remained in a poor condition for a long time.

Passengers who travel on the route said that because of the damaged roads, traffic congestion is a regular occurrence as buses are forced to travel at a very low speed.

"A large number of trucks move on this road which contributes to the jam. The truck drivers' association is

very strong and they never care about complaints" said Abdul Moyeen, who travels on the route regularly.

Although there is an alternative route to Narayanganj -- the Bishwa Road from Motijheel which is in fine condition many bus operators and truck drivers still prefer the route via Pagla and Postagola.

Passengers and bus drivers say that due to the movement of cargo-laden heavy trucks, the road wears out quicker than other highways. It has also been alleged that low quality bitumen was used

in carpeting the road and because of that, cracks and potholes developed within three or four weeks after carpeting had finished.

Hijacking is another menace that has been on the rise, especially at night, complained passengers. Hijackers in the guise of passengers get on board and when buses invariably get stuck at traffic jams in dark parts of the highway near Jatrabari, Jurain or Postagola they start mugging passengers and get off without a hitch.

Accidents have become

common also with at least three mishaps taking place every week.

There are at least five sitting bus operators and a number of local bus services on the route. Anondo and Borak each have at least 35 thirty-six-seater buses on their fleet. Buses leave Gulistan every five minutes and are usually packed to the full.

Salahuddin Ahmed, lawmaker from the constituency, said that the matter has been discussed with the communications minister and renovation work on the road is sup-

posed to start by March this year and end in June.

Salahuddin added that a 65 crore Taka project will be undertaken this year which is at its proposal stage. "The project will be run by Roads and Highways Department. It will include development of a Narayanganj link road which will go up to Rampura and will be named Matuail New Model road. The traffic congestion will greatly decrease after the construction," said Salahuddin.

9x8