

It has been reported in an English daily that Mrs Malati Tambay Vaidya, managing director of the National Film Development Corporation, said during her recent press conference in Calcutta that the NFDC would jointly finance the setting up of a theatre on Gariahat Road along with the West Bengal Film Development Corporation. This made very strange reading.

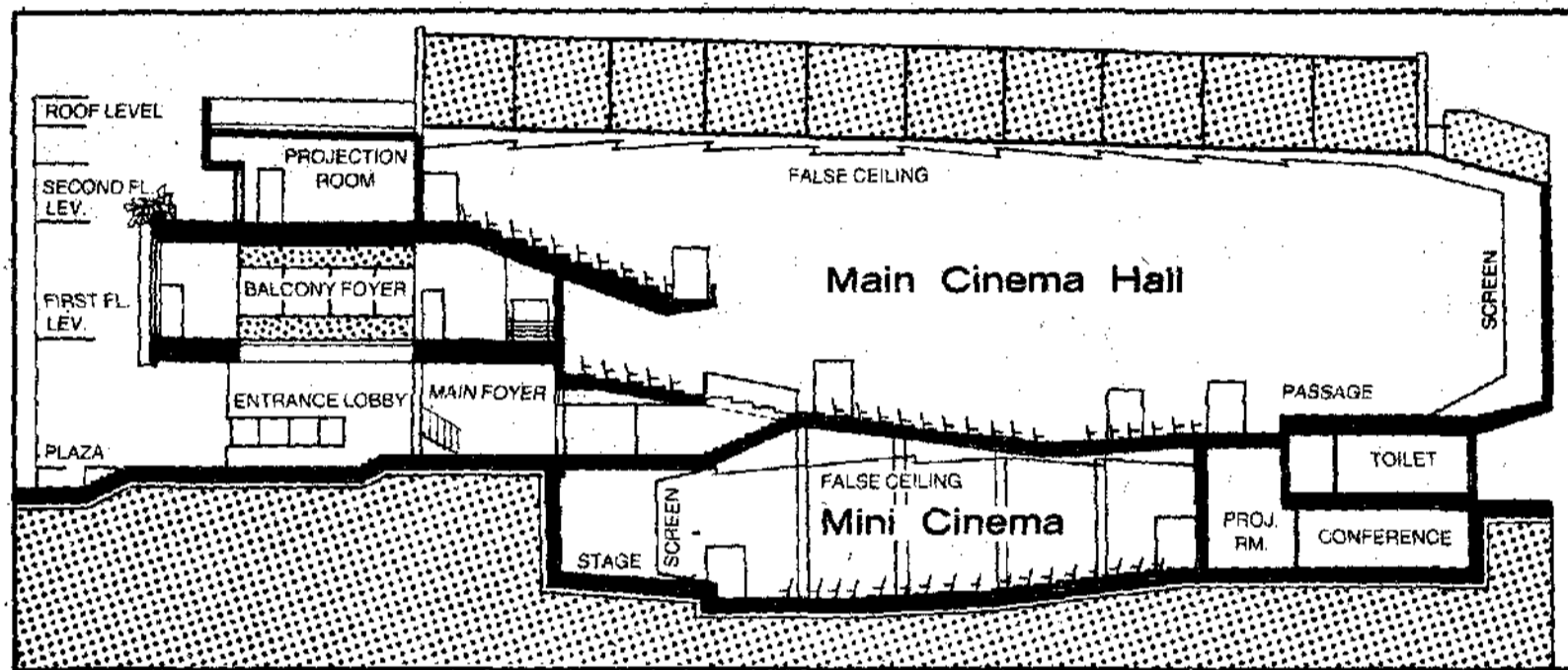
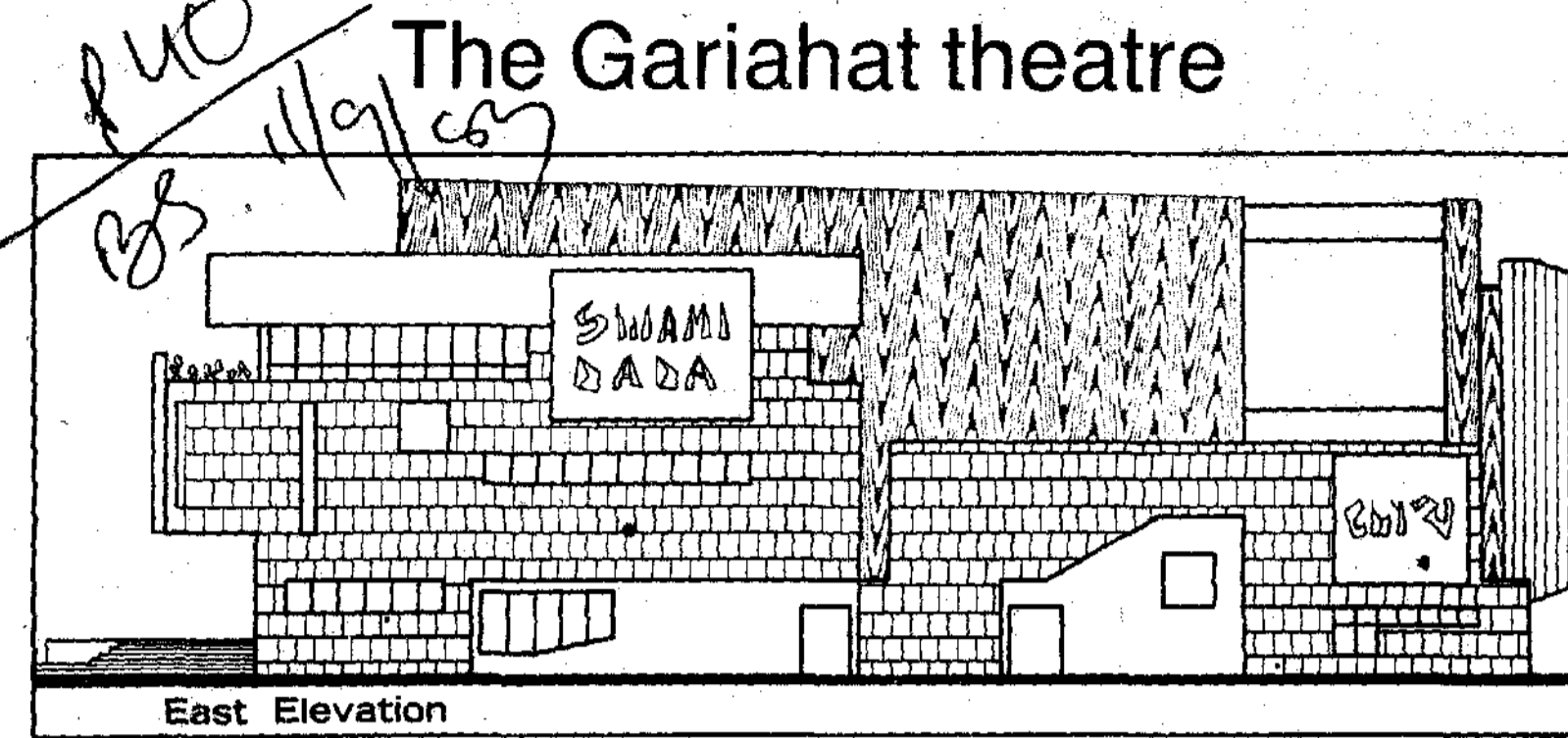
Last week, I was informed by reliable sources that the head of the NFDC had in a written communication to the WBFDC expressed regret that it would not be in a financial position to enter into a joint agreement on setting up the proposed theatre on Gariahat Road. This was said to be a policy decision on the part of the NFDC. It was learnt that the NFDC would be under financial constraints because of the government of India's ambitious plans for the expansion of Doodarshan.

The two-in-one cinema hall is proposed to be built at the Gariahat spot development scheme at a cost of Rs one crore. The plan is to have a main hall with a seating capacity of 1150 on the ground and balcony levels and a mini-cinema at the basement with a capacity of 420 seats. The materialisation of the project would have considerably eased the poor audience-seat ratio in the fast developing southern suburbs of the city.

Earlier the NFDC had agreed to finance the project on the basis of a fifty-fifty equity participation along with the WBFDC. It had been decided that the NFDC and the WBFDC would have equity participation worth Rs 25 lakh each, the remaining Rs 50 lakhs being raised by term loans from commercial banks and financial institutions. The West Bengal government would have given the land.

Everything was going along swimmingly. And then came the volte face by the NFDC. The chairman's communication has created tremendous obstacles for the WBFDC which is grappling with the ills of the West Bengal film industry. Against this background, Mrs Tambay Vaidya's reported statement on the joint venture at Gariahat is most intriguing. We must patiently wait for the next instalment.

The crisis in West Bengal's film industry has been highlighted often enough on several platforms. Two major factors which continue to plague the industry are the acute shortage of exhibition outlets and the overwhelming lack of infrastructural facilities.



# NFDC's volte face

The phenomenal problem of securing release chains for a new film can be understood when one looks at the available figures and compares the paucity of halls in this state with the availability in other states. West Bengal, with one of the highest population densities in the country, has only 433 permanent cinema halls as against the 1,282 in Andhra Pradesh, 972 in Tamil Nadu, and 707 in Maharashtra.

The scarcity of cinema halls has had the most disastrous effect on the programme for the revival of the film industry initiated during the first term of the present left front government. A number of films financed by the West Bengal government either wholly or partially are lying in cans with no halls to go to.

To redress this imbalance in the film policy of the government, the West Bengal Film Development Corporation, set up two and a half months ago under the chairmanship of Mr Amiya Kumar Gooptu, has defined for itself certain priority areas. These Mr Gooptu hopes to tackle within a

## CALCUTTA/Ella Datta

time frame.

The first priority of course is an increase in the number of exhibition facilities. Mr Gooptu feels justifiably pleased that the WBFDC has managed to get Utpalendu Chakrabarty's *Chokh* released. The other positive step that Mr Gooptu has to report is the release of four state-managed halls for regular screenings of West Bengal government produced or aided films.

The four halls are the University Institute hall, the Mahajati Sadan, the Ahindra Mancha and the CIT hall at Rabindra Sarovar. The four ministers under whose departments the administration of these halls belong, namely Mr Shambhu Ghosh, Mr Jatin Chakravarti, Mr Provas Phodikar and Mr Prasanta Sur, have met and agreed to release the halls either for a limited number of daily screenings or for a limited period, the modalities to be worked out shortly. Meanwhile, such administrative

formalities as police permission and so on have already been received.

Simultaneously, Mr Gooptu said, the organisation was being geared towards the setting up of a colour film laboratory fitted with the most modern equipment at an investment of Rs 6 crore at the Salt Lake development area. It is hoped that the project will be completed within a time schedule.

According to Mr Gooptu, the WBFDC will be commercially oriented and all the projects taken up will have economic viability in mind. The colour film laboratory is a case in point. Not only will it contribute towards infrastructural development but pay its way as well.

Even while the formal inauguration of the regional centre of the Lalit Kala Akademi awaits finalisation, the West Bengal PWD minister has come forward with a generous offer for the artists of West Bengal. Telling me about the offer, Amitabha Banerjee, the graphic artist, said that

Mr Jatin Chakrabarty offered to give the centre a litho machine and a number of litho stones. The minister has even agreed to have the equipment transported to the centre.

This magnanimous gesture will enable six graphic artists to work in the lithographic studio at a time. It will also help to release the amount for some other much needed equipment.

Initially, the central authorities of the Lalit Kala Akademi had promised during their visit to the city early last month that the regional centre would be formally inaugurated some time towards the end of September. Accordingly, a superhuman effort was made by Paritosh Sen and Amitabha Banerjee of the local co-ordinating committee to get the place in reasonable shape. The co-ordinating committee has a third member, namely Provas Sen, the sculptor, who for reasons of work has had to spend considerable time at Santiniketan.

One of the major hurdles faced by the local committee has been the trickling in of funds. The LKA had budgeted a sum of Rs 1.5 lakhs towards plan and non-plan expenditure for the current year to be spent in developing, equipping and running the regional centre. Of this allocated amount, less than half has been received so far by the regional centre, thus seriously hampering the work in progress and creating tremendous pressure on the members of the co-ordinating committee.

Even so, the regional centre at the Keyatolla Lane has turned out to be a pretty spot. There is a feeling of welcome expressed by the flourishing greenery all around. The red brick-work and the whitewashed walls create a charming contrast to the lush green of the well-tended plants. Already young people have begun work at the engraving studio. More funds are needed to complete work on the other studios so that they may begin to function as well. The West Bengal forest department has created a nice little shrubbery outside the regional centre.

A major attraction of the regional centre is the sales counter stocking all the LKA publications. Well-produced books and monographs, beautiful prints, both singles and in sets, of contemporary paintings and miniatures are offered at extremely reasonable prices. These make excellent gift ideas for those who like to give offbeat presents. All in all, the LKA regional centre is a pleasant place for congregating and needs greater patronisation from not only the local artists but art lovers as well.