



DAILY TIMES LAHORE



'Charing Cross' — a journey through Pakistan's political history

By Arsalan Haider

LAHORE: Charing Cross, the British colonial rule's residual in the heart of Lahore, has its own history, importance and significance. However, many citizens are unaware of its background.

Ajoka Theatre's play 'Charing Cross' highlighted the story of the city's most famous square. The play was staged at Alhambra, The Mall for two days. The performance received appreciation from the audience.

Pakistan people's Party (PPP) Central leader Qamar Zaman Kaira also attended one of the performances.

Written and directed by Ajoka's Shahid Mehmood Nadeem the play highlighted all major political and social changes on Pakistani landscape with Lahore's Charing Cross as a witness.

The play progressed in a chronological order from creation of Pakistan and depicted all the significant political phases and events which took place during various decades till the assassination of people's favorite leader Benazir Bhutto. From the rise and fall of presidents, military dictators and prime minister to the popularity of different political trends such as socialism, religious revival and privatisation, the biggest events in the history of the country were narrated in the play.

The stage had been designed by Ansel Kazmi. The white pavilion of Queen Victoria's statue was at the centre and all the action took place in front of it.

Talented actors of Ajoka helped the play to continue its rhythm. Characters of Miss Malka and Almas played by Mehreen Imran and Hina Tariq, respectively, received the most



Senior actor Arshad Durrani portrayed the character of Hara Sain, a passionate supporter of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Pakistan

People Party. Usman Raj played the role of Shahbaz, who is materialistic and changes his affiliation to benefit from each ruler according to the trend of the time.

Folk music, local songs and poetry was also part of the play. Creative choreographer Wahab Shah choreographed the dance sequence of the play, which enriched the aesthetics of production. Talking to Daily Times about the play, Wahab Shah said that working with Ajoka had always been a pleasure. "This time we have selected a very interesting story that not only has enormous entertaining strength, but also great scope for the performers to deliver," he said.

Talking to Daily Times, Director Shahid Nadeem said: "I remember the turbulent and exciting days of anti-Ayub movement in the late 1960s, when I was a student leader of the Punjab University. We used to march from the University New Campus to the Charing Cross on The Mall, where students from the Old Campus and other education-

al institutions would converge." He went on saying that the student's movement was followed by a historic mass political movement which led to the fall of Ayub Khan and the emergence of the Bhutto phenomenon.

"I recall listening to the fiery speeches of Bhutto and inspiring poetry recitals of Jalib at the Charing Cross. Alflah, Wapda House and Hilton/Avri buildings rose, Queen Victoria's statue was relocated to its permanent abode in the museum, amidst the deafening noise of the juggernaut of big business and industry.

However, despite the noise, the smoke, unplanned expansion and mushrooming of small businesses, Charing Cross is still a popular destination where people express their anger, their frustrations, their dreams in political rallies, religious dharnas and sit-ins by the workers, the physically handi-

capped or the young protestors," he said.

Talking about the play specifically, Shahid said that 'Charing Cross', the play, was not just about the place, but about the city of Lahore and broadly speaking about Pakistan. "The monumental changes and upheavals witnessed by Charing Cross have pulled and pushed the Pakistani society into different and sometimes opposite directions, veering towards left and right, upwards and downwards, towards peace and compassion and violence and hatred. In front of this vast and expansive backdrop are told stories of ordinary people, affected, inspired or disillusioned by the gigantic events taking place around them. In view of the fast-paced and mind-boggling changes taking place on and around the square, we can say that Charing Cross is a 'developing story'," he said.





THE NEWS LAHORE

THE NEWS



Rafi Peer
Presents
Music for Peace
**Mystic Music
Sufi Festival**
on 9th - 11th February, 2018
7:00 p.m onwards
at Alhamra Cultural Complex
Qaddafi Stadium, Lahore
☎ 0300 8432626/0300 8422200
📍 /Rafipeertheatreworkshop

The Lahore Arts Council
Bilawal Shaikh(DA)

