

Pirates rule the film industry



The craze for the latest multimedia products has ensured a flourishing pirate trade in VCDs and DVDs.

How can the local film industry compete when the very latest foreign films are available in the market within 24 hours of their release abroad

CITY CORRESPONDENT

The craze for computer based multimedia entertainment has created a booming market in pirated video compact discs (VCDs) and digital video discs (DVDs) in the city. Over the last decade, Bangladesh has joined other Asian countries such as Singapore, India, Thailand and Pakistan as an avid consumer of these pirated VCD and DVD products.

The Stadium Market and Eastern Plaza are the main points of sale for the latest movies on compact and digital video discs, though they are also available on the footpaths of Elephant Road and around the Farmgate area.

With the increase in demand, VCD and DVD clubs are opening at an ever-increasing rate throughout the city. However, most of the club owners do not concern themselves with the legal issues related to the distribution of pirated video products.

When the proprietor of a prominent video club was questioned regarding these issues, he said, "VCDs and DVDs have been sold and distributed in Dhaka illegally from the very beginning. But we still continue, since there is such a high demand for the latest Hindi and English movies."

Regarding the sources of these latest movies, he added, "Basically, there are a

number of groups who provide us with the latest movies. The ring has its base in Malaysia and Pakistan."

The movies are recorded in theatres when they are released abroad. They are then mailed through the Internet to groups in Malaysia or Pakistan. Here, after some filtering and editing, the movies are burnt onto compact or digital discs. These are then distributed by smugglers to various destinations. Usually they travel by air and therefore, the very latest movies like Matrix Reload, X-Men 2 and Devidas are found in Dhaka only fifteen to sixteen hours after their release in foreign countries. But proof of their piracy is apparent in the viewing as the shadows of audience members can be seen at the bottom of the screen.

"A few days back, the Malaysian authority got strict and supplies have diminished from that side," said the video club owner. "Now, Pakistan is the reigning supplier," he concluded.

The demand for Bengali movies has diminished, due to piracy and the screening of foreign movies by cable operators. But Bangladeshi films are also being pirated these days.

Film actor Ujjal, also the General Secretary of the Bangladesh Film Producers Association, said in this regard: "There is a law against piracy but it is not being utilized in the full sense."

"Bangladesh has a very small market for

the film industry with around 1200 cinema halls countrywide. Through extensive marketing and distribution, a new movie may run in around 300-400 cinemas. Usually only 20 to 25 prints are made of a movie. But somehow within 24 to 72 hours of a movie's release, it is found in all the video CD clubs," said the actor.

As people prefer to watch these films in the comfort of their own homes, the Bangladeshi film industry is suffering both from pirated foreign and Bangladeshi films.

"When we asked the government for help, they informed us that there is already a copyright law passed by the Cultural Ministry and this has been modified to include video and audio piracy," said Ujjal.

The Copyright Law Act 2000 was updated in 2002 to provide penalties and punishment for video and audio piracy of up to 4 years imprisonment and up to Tk 3 lakh fine.

"Furthermore, to fall under this law, every Bengali movie would need to be registered before being released. But copyright registration costs a producer Tk 60,000 to Tk 80,000. It would be better for producers if the Copyright Act recognizes a movie as soon as it acquires the Censor Certificate," said the actor.

"But the normal public, the video pirates along with the authorities are unaware of this law and thus piracy continues," said Ujjal.

Adulterated food abounds

SOHEL ISLAM

Health inspectors found 67 per cent of dairy and oil products adulterated in a laboratory analysis on 137 samples at the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC).

The DCC Public Health Food Laboratory collected the samples from different markets in Dhaka this May and came up with the findings proving that a slew of food items consumed every day are adulterated.

Going a month back in April,

89.36 per cent of the food items were found adulterated in tests on 47 samples, said Golam Sarwar, chief chemist of the Public Health Food Laboratory.

"The quality of *dalda* (a fat-rich product) is not up to the mark at all. The melting point of *dalda* is 50 degrees Celsius. By contrast, a human body cannot process food that needs more than 37 degrees Celsius to melt," Sarwar pointed out to prove the effect of some adulterated products on human health.

"If someone asks me about

dalda, I must say it should be banned immediately. *dalda* is being widely used in the foods like *biriani*, *moglai parata*, *polao*, chicken roast and others served in restaurants. It takes a heavy toll on human health," said another DCC health department official who preferred not to be named.

In April and May, 51 samples were collected from sweet shops and all but two tested adulterated. "We cannot carry out every necessary test on sweets due to lack of equipment. What we do is test mois-

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turiser and fat in the sweets, but both ingredients were substandard," said the chief chemist.

Sauce and jam-jelly items, especially the local ones, fall far short of standards. "Most local sauces have failed to pass the soluble solid test.

Only Modern Food Processing Limited, producing sauces, can pass the standard mark set by the BSTI (Bangladesh Standard Testing Institution), said Sarwar.

Chief Health Officer Mohammed Ashraf Uddin told The Daily Star, "Our inspectors have filed cases against the unscrupulous people who violated the food standards."

The department has so far filed more than 1,000 cases against the dishonest persons and organisations, he said.

In most cases, these people can get away, paying only Tk 200 in fines -- the anti-adulteration measure prescribed in the Municipality Ordinance of 1969.

"The government should go for more stringent punishment, as days have changed," said a DCC health department official.

Meanwhile, the department held a meeting on adulterated food items and remedies recently, where the Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB) was present.

The DCC in association with the CAB, the commerce ministry and representatives of print and electronic media will form inspection teams, according to a decision of the meeting. The groups will launch anti-adulteration drives and prescribe punishment.



DCC health inspectors found 67 per cent of dairy and oil products adulterated in a recent test.

Income tax too much for young architects

AVIK SANWAR RAHMAN

The Institute of Architects Bangladesh has expressed deep concern on the mandatory income tax imposed by the finance minister in this year's national budget.

"It is not rational to impose mandatory income tax on young architects just to fill the deficit of revenue income caused by the dishonesty of tax payers," said Mubassher Hossain, the president of the Institute of Architects Bangladesh (IAB) at a recent meeting.

Speakers at the meeting stressed that architecture is a profession based on mental labour. The scope for architects is also very limited in this country.

People have only started to recognize the importance of architectural planning. A mandatory minimum of Tk 12,000 in income tax on all architects will create a barrier for the development of this growing profession.

Though the IAB sets a guideline for architects' fees, it is not maintained because of lack of government legislation.

"We don't have any legislative status and there is no enforcement by the government regarding our fees. If there was a fixed percentage we would be able to charge the client accordingly," said Mahfil Ali, a partner of Ingrid Architects.

Every year at least 100 gradu-



The newly imposed income tax could drive even more young architects out of an already difficult market.

ate architects graduate from the country's universities and many more from diploma courses. Fifty per cent of architects are women. But many architects, both men and women remain unemployed.

Therefore, many change professions. "Newly graduated architects on average get a monthly income of Tk 6,000 at an private architectural firm, and it does not rise much. Because of the low wages, architects commonly switch their profession to

photography, painting, interior design and fashion designing," said Rumana Rasheed, who is studying for a Masters degree in architecture at BUET.

Young architects must remain candidate members of IAB for two years before they can get full membership. Architects also require membership of Rajdhani Unnayan Kortipakhkha (RAJUK) for the signing authority needed to pass their designs by RAJUK.

But there is no comprehensive legislation that enforces or moni-

tors an architect's involvement in the design of a building. "Customers could easily design the building themselves or use any draftsman and get a signature from an architect," explained freelance architect, Khaled Saifullah Shagar.

The speakers also said that in a situation where less than five per cent of buildings are not designed by qualified architects, the mandatory income tax on young professionals will destroy the profession as a whole.

Bid over for flyover

CITY CORRESPONDENT

Five construction firms have shown an interest in building the Jatrabari-Gulistan Flyover, said DCC sources, following the opening of the tender box on Monday June 30.

At least 30 districts of Chittagong and Sylhet divisions will be immensely benefited once the flyover is constructed.

The decision to construct a flyover from Jatrabari to Gulistan, to ease traffic snarl-ups on this route, was settled in April

at a meeting presided over by the Prime Minister. Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) invited international tenders on April 26 this year.

"The DCC has estimated that Tk 500 crore may be needed to construct this flyover. Its construction is likely to start October this year if everything goes according to our plan," said a source at the DCC.

The Dhaka Urban Transport Project Department of the DCC hoped that the Jatrabari-Gulistan flyover would be completed within three years from the start of construction.

Initially, Development Construction Ltd, a local contractor responsible for the under-construction Khilgaon flyover, was the only firm to show an interest in the new flyover. But two Malaysian firms Menuju Asas Bhd and Projalma Construction Bhd have also participated in the bidding. The other participants are joint ventures one is Cord-Percon-JV (Malaysia-Singapore) and the other is Belhasa-Accom-JV (India-UAE).

A committee, comprising the Dhaka Transport Co-ordination Board, DCC, Local Government

and Engineering Department, Institute of Architects Bangladesh, Institution of Engineers and international experts, will scrutinise the bids, after which the successful contractor will be invited to come up with a detailed proposal.

In 1996, the Roads and Highways Department (RHD) undertook a project to construct a Jatrabari-Gulistan flyover with financing from the World Bank (WB). But in 2002, the WB cancelled the project and withdrew the money complaining of the RHD's inefficiency in starting the construction on time.