

Piracy in audio-video markets threatens genuine traders

MIZANUR KHAN

Pirated audio and video compact discs have flooded pushing artists, producers and production houses out of business.

A syndicate of unscrupulous businessmen has been very active in promoting and selling CDs violating copyright laws as law enforcers turn a blind eye to this practice, businessmen allege.

Associations of audiocassette and movie distributors claimed at least 20 audio companies and more than 50 movie houses have been shut down because of this unlawful business in the recent years. They said, as the copyright law is not properly enforced to prevent piracy the creative industry has come under a big threat, indicating that the law is not so strong and effective.

"The audio industry faces a bleak future," said Mir Kamir Uddin, president of Bangladesh Audio and CD Producers Association and also the owner of Classic Products, an audiocassette producing company.

A frustrated Kamir Uddin who is the business for 20

years said the industry has already lost its glamour, as producers back out from new investment. An association spokesman said that a decade back, nearly 700 audiocassettes were released a year but now the number has reduced to only 50.

Staff of many audio production companies and shops were retrenched while companies like Dawn, Prime and Sharp were closed down. Because of widespread video piracy movie halls like Gulistan, Naz, Beauty, Mollika, Rupmahal, Tajmahal, Moon, Jyoti, Shabistan and Lion have already been shut down.

Singers are deprived of royalty, producers of their business while the government is deprived of huge amount of revenue. "Marking the Eid festival some companies released four albums of popular singer Mamtaz but we found all four albums in one CD in the black market," said Shamin Ahmed, General Manager of KT Series at Patuatuly, the centre of audiocassette and CD business in Old Dhaka.

"Artists, musicians, producers, distributors, retailers,

wholesalers, studio owners, designers, press owners and many others have been victimised," said Ahmed.

He said hit albums are reproduced in a day and companies do not receive re-orders for these albums.

Sale of pirated audio video CDs at Farmgate, Baitul Mukarram, Aziz Super Market, Eastern Plaza, Stadium Market, New Market, Gulistan, Paltan, Motijheel, Patuatuly, BDR shopping complex and other big shopping malls is an open secret. They are also available on city footpaths.

Audio piracy started in the early 90s but it has turned into a plague from 1996 when computers became available. "Computer is for the development of the nation but we found it a pirating tool," said Ahmed.

Audio businesspersons said whenever a new audio CD hits the market, a play screened on the television or a new movie is released these are immediately copied and marketed the next day.

"Because of the tremendous advancement in technology it has become very easy to copy a CD. It takes a few minutes,

costs a little and can be done

anywhere," said Mohammad Delwar, a member of Soundtech.

Buyers also prefer pirated CDs, as they get more songs or movies or dramas in a single compact disk. "You can convert sound files into mp3 with more than 200 songs or three to four movies in just one CD which can be played with the multimedia software in the computer," he said.

The youth are fond of such CDs. "We can buy a CD with a hundred songs for only Tk 20 to 25 from footpaths. Why should I buy it from a company?" asked Amir Hossain, a college student who was looking for a CD with band music at Farmgate.

Sources said CDs are pirated out of Dhaka and distributed to various markets. The association ran an anti-piracy drive with the help of local police and arrested more than 250 people involved in piracy.

"There is a nexus that does such business in connivance with the police," said a member of the association.

Sources said, prior to these drives law enforcers send information to people involved

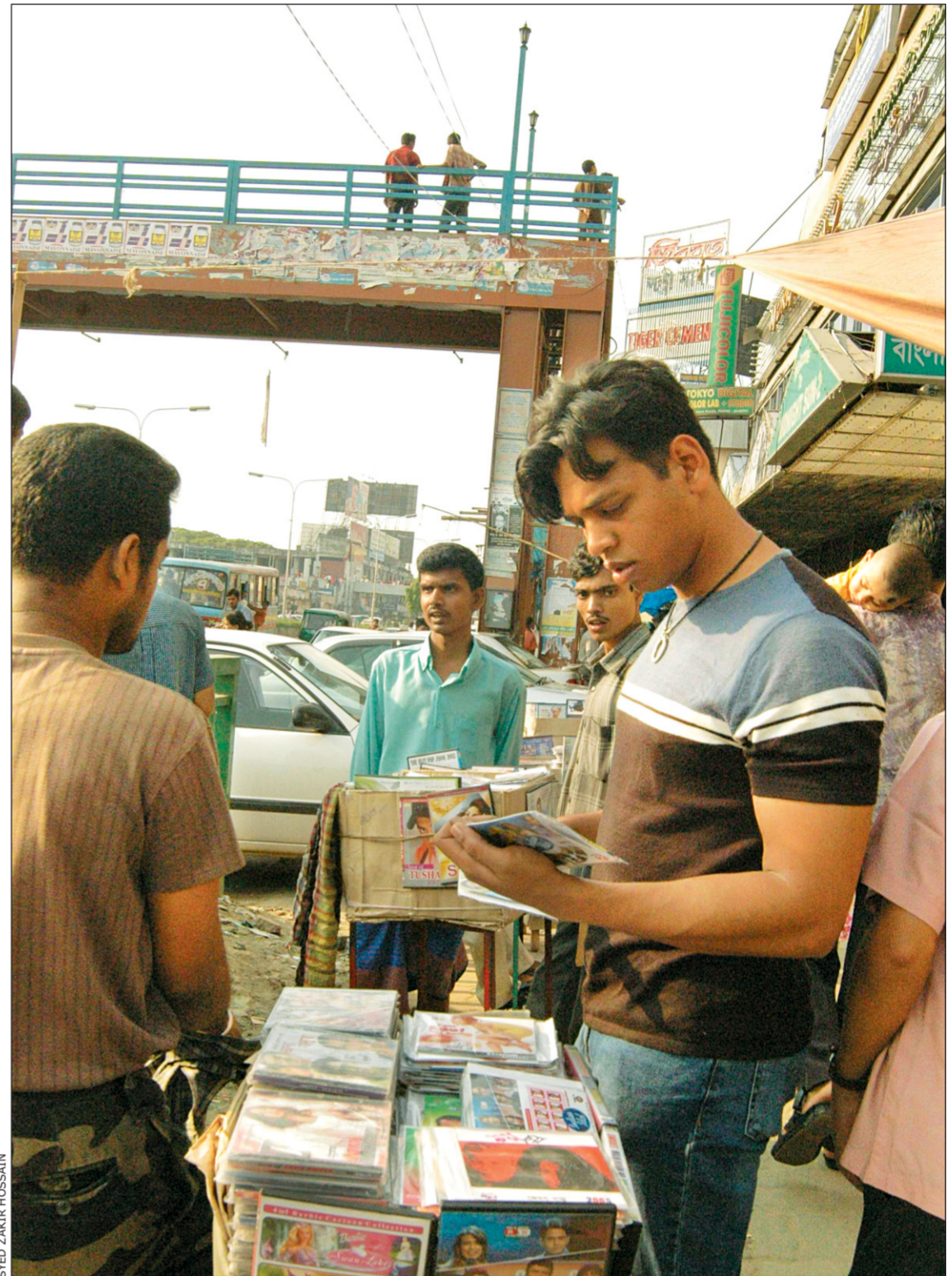
in the business to help them hide the pirated CDs. They termed the drive an 'eyewash'.

"Film and drama producers said the pirates target hit movies and the industry is destroyed and producers are now not interested in producing good movies," said Ashrafuddin Ahmed Uzzal, General Secretary of Bangladesh Film Producers and Distributors Association (BFPDA).

The Cultural and Information Ministry is working hard and has already made progress to enact laws to protect such illegalities, said a Bangladesh Film Development Corporation (BFDC) source.

"BFDC does not have any mechanisms to trap such piracy. We just have to be aware and collectively fight this practice," said BFDC's Managing Director, Khalilur Rahman Siddiqui.

An advertisement against piracy will be screened on all TV channels very soon where all artists will appeal to the public against piracy.



Youth find it cheaper to buy pirated CDs from footpaths as they stand to gain more.

North Bashabo suffering due to incomplete pipeline



This channel in North Bashabo constructed to let water flow into the marsh is yet to be completed. The incomplete waterway poses a threat to the general public, as such ditches prevent vehicles entering the main road.

STAR PHOTO

SABRINA KARIM MURSHED

Residents of north Bashabo are suffering as the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) has left the construction of a drainage pipe of Khilgaon flyover incomplete.

Water pipes designed to drain out rainwater accumulated on the flyover had been constructed under the main road on the eastern side of Khilgaon rail crossing. It stretches from Khilgaon fruit market in the north to central Bashabo in

the South.

However, an under construction channel in the middle through north Bashabo, which will have the water flowing into the marsh behind the Jhilpar Mosque, has been left incomplete.

Residents of north Bashabo said the area has become almost unlivable due to the incomplete pipeline. "We are confronting difficulties in commuting as huge ditches exist on the road," said Saiful Islam, a local resident.

The ditches prevent vehi-

cles from entering the main road. "I have no other way but to keep my car in a garage in Shahjahanpur because of this dug up road," said another resident.

Locals said the construction work of the 500-meter long pipeline had remained stopped for the last three months. Apart from creating unbearable communication problems, it is also contributing to the deteriorating law and order situation in the area.

"Drug addicts have taken refuge inside the massive concrete pipes on the road

and even inside the ones that have been fixed. They often come out and mug people who pass by," said another resident.

Water remains stagnant in the ditches even when there is little or no rain. "Water easily drip into the pipes as most are cracked," said a local. The stagnant water has increased the mosquito menace in the area.

North Bashabo Residents also claimed that while the pipeline has been placed on higher plains near its northern and southern ends, the ground in the middle is

below that level. They feared that with the area being low, it could be flooded if water overflowed in the rainy season.

When asked LGED officials said that they would finish the construction work as soon as possible. They said that as local people had proposed some changes in the alignment of the pipeline, the completion was taking a little longer.

"Ultimately the pipeline will be connected to the drainage line of Wasa," said a high official of LGED.

Graffiti, posters make city walls dirty

SYED TASHFIN CHOWDHURY

The city looks dirty due to an increasing trend of putting up graffiti and sticking posters on walls for advertising or political campaign.

As this practice is going on unabated, the government and private owners of buildings have to spend a lot on cleaning, whitewashing and colouring the walls.

Small business firms like coaching centers, beauty parlours and clinics opt for graffiti, posters and banners as these are the cheapest means of advertisement.

Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) sources said people engaged in such activities can be punished for damaging public or private property as per existing law.

"Small firms are inclining towards graffiti and banners to get maximum exposure for their products or services at the lowest cost," said a resident of Dhanmondi.

The business firms hire sign-board painters who write the graffiti after midnight. Street urchins help them in finishing the job as quickly as possible.

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Most private house and other establishment owners are now going for whitewashing their walls instead of using distemper or plastic emulsion paints as whitewashing costs much less than distemping the walls.

"I had no other choice but to whitewash my walls as I had distemped these around three times earlier but within a week or two, I found new graffiti on them,"

said Kabir Ahmed, a house owner residing of Kalabagan.

The owners spend around Tk 1,500 to Tk 2,000 to paint a 10X20 feet wall with plastic emulsion while whitewashing costs Tk 700 to Tk 900. Owners however said whitewashed walls are damped easily during the rainy season.

Matters are worse for public property like government office buildings, schools and colleges, as these are usually re-painted once in a year.

When contacted, the manager of an advertising firm said they take permission from the owners before using their walls for graffiti.

But the principal of Law College at Kalabagan said nobody ever came to ask for permission for putting graffiti on the college walls.

Senior officials of the Conservancy Department of DCC said they have started a drive recently to stop this practice. They will contact the advertisers and ask them to repaint the walls back to its original form.

"We will be bound to take lawful measures against them if they do not comply to this direction," said a DCC official.



Billboards are for large scale advertising, but these notices on outer side of parapet walls seem to give these small industries the projection they need.

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