

Eye-straining TV channels

Piracy plagues cable TV as viewers deprived of popular pay channels

CITY CORRESPONDENT

A few thousand Dhaka residents may turn on their television sets only to confront flickering and see badly rendered images and hazy shadows.

The appearance of these eye-watering television channels is all part of a section of cable operators' unscrupulous marketing efforts gone awry.

To fulfil the needs of their customers, these cable operators give them a glimpse of many of the pay channels through piracy and illegal

However, this has not stopped the cable operators from resorting to piracy and illegally broadcasting a number of pay channels to their viewers.

Although the quality of these channels is pretty mediocre with badly rendered and hazy images, the subscribers are made to pay the full government-set fees for them.

In July last year the information ministry set the fees for cable TV subscription at Tk 300 per month for operators providing 60 channels

from the distributors. We have to pay around Tk 280 to Tk 290 to distributors against each connection," he said.

Although cable television companies spend huge amount of money to install new, high-tech systems around the city, the service remains poor.

Subscribers say they cannot reach cable companies in case of any complaints about service, broadcasting of unnecessary and offensive channels.

As the cable television industry remains

monopolistic and anti-competitive, subscribers often raise questions about the indiscriminate rates and poor consumer service.

The authorities also have their own complaints to add to the list.

Although the cable operators are collecting unreasonably high charges from viewers, they are allegedly not paying the right amount of taxes to the government, National Board of Revenue (NBR) sources said.

While the amount of VAT and supplementary duty collected from the cable operators have been gradually increasing, the government is still being deprived of a gigantic proportion of taxes, the sources added.

"Dodging taxes is possible because the government does not have a mechanism to estimate the exact number of connections," said a pay channel distributor.

"Although Cable Operators' Association of Bangladesh has an estimation on the number of connections, it is quite vague. Therefore, the authorities have no way to know whether if they are receiving the right amount of taxes," he said.



Cable TV is becoming boring for the viewers day by day.



cabling.

But because of the deficiencies that come up with illegal and flawed wiring, the subscribers now get to watch the channels with low quality picture.

"Through channel piracy and illegal wiring, some cable operators are broadcasting many popular pay channels to collect higher fees from their subscribers," said Jamil, a cable television technician from Tilpapara.

According to sources, many cable television operators have not paid their dues to the pay channel distributors. As a result, broadcasting of a number of popular pay channels have been halted in many city areas.

"Distributors have a huge amount of fees due from many cable operators. So they have stopped the broadcast of some popular pay channels to compel the operators to pay their dues accordingly," said Abul Kalam, a cable operator from Rayerbazar.

including at least 30 pay channels.

Consequently, many cable operators are illegally broadcasting the 30 pay channels and claiming the Tk 300 fees from their subscribers.

"They are broadcasting the pay channels without consent from the distributors. As a result, the viewers are getting poor quality images," said Abul Kalam.

According to Kamrul Islam, information secretary of Cable Operators Association of Bangladesh, the monthly fees for each pay channel adds up to an outrageous sum.

"The number of pay channels needs to be reduced, as there are lots of unnecessary channels which subscribers do not want to watch. But we have to pay a huge amount of money for these channels," he said.

"The government directed cable operators to charge each client Tk 300 monthly, but it did not fix our purchase rate

city express

The latest crop of quotes from the city's press -- words worth repeating, we feel, for their humour, insight or sheer outrageousness. Star City does not necessarily support the opinions expressed in this column.

"Not that we don't talk to each other at all. We had talked in the past and will have talks also in the future."

-- Sheikh Hasina

Awami League Chief

Told reporters after meeting her political archrival Khaleda Zia at a reception at Senakunja at Dhaka Cantonment to mark Armed Forces Day, on Friday. Source: The Daily Star

"This has surprised, disappointed and saddened the people. The people of this country have not waited two years for a one-sided, stage-managed election."

-- Khaleda Zia

BNP Chairperson

Said commenting about the EC announcement of holding the election on December 18 at a press conference at her Gulshan office, on Thursday. Source: The Daily Star

"It's almost certain that the national election won't be held on December 18."

-- ATM Shamsul Huda

Chief Election Commissioner

Told reporters after meeting the Awami League-led grand alliance at the EC secretariat, on Saturday. Source: The Daily Star

"Instead of talking about the price of essentials, businessmen are talking about politics."

-- Ruhin Hossain Prince

CPB central leader

Said at a roundtable, on Friday. Source: Porthom Alo

"I won't deny that we couldn't achieve all that we thought was possible. I need not give the reasons that are by now quite obvious. I can only affirm that there was no dearth of sincere effort and urge on our part to do the best."

-- Hassan Mashhud Chowdhury

ACC Chief

Said in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star, on Saturday. Source: The Daily Star



Days are changing in city slums as the dwellers are taking steps to fight crime and improve life.

Slums still not beyond hope

RAIHAN SABUKTAGIN

Crimes committed from the city's Korail slum have marked a decline thanks to awareness and skill development programmes carried out under non-government and community initiatives.

Visiting the vast slum under Gulshan Police Station this correspondent found some positive signs of unity against crime among the dwellers.

Abdul Mannan, chairman of the Committee to Protect Rights of the Slum dwellers, who is living at the Korail slum since 1996, said in the past social security was worst in this slum. Drug peddlers and criminals dominated the slum and females could not live with honour.

"But now the situation is better. The slum dwellers are united against crime and aware of maintaining their security. We got help from the police as well," he added.

Several thousand people are living in dark and dirty houses in an acutely congested area on about 150 acres of land in Korail slum. About half of the inhabitants are third and fourth-class employees of Bangladesh Telegraph and Telephone Board.

Mannan said outsiders are not visiting the slum these days as drug peddling has been stopped through community initiative. Children are going to the schools run by NGOs. Besides, commu-

nal harmony is growing among the dwellers.

Dwellers are now approaching jointly and more systematically to different government authorities for urban facilities. "Living style is a key factor. If you live in a dirty environment, dirt would affect your thoughts and activities, and it might cost the

security threat.

Mohammad Abdul Momin, officer in-charge of Pallabi Police Station, said there are 45 slums for the Urdu-speaking people known as Biharis or stranded Pakistanis, which are the biggest concern for the police as they find it very difficult to deal with.

According to a survey

"But now the situation is better. The slum dwellers are united against crime and aware of maintaining their security. We got help from the police as well"

whole society," Mannan said.

Obaidul Haque, officer in-charge of Gulshan Police Station said, criminals used slums as their operating base because it is easy to hide there. But crime rate at this slum is lower than other slums mainly because of their awareness and unity against crime.

"Slums always keep an extra pressure on the police but I personally believe that development of the slum dwellers can reduce the pressure," he added.

This correspondent visited some other slums including those in Mirpur and Pallabi to see the crime and security situation there. Most people said the slums are a big

conducted by Center For Urban Studies (CUS) in collaboration with international donor agencies revealed that there were 4,966 slums in the city in 2005. The number of slums has increased in the last three years.

More than 38 percent of the total city population lives in slums, the study says.

Because of a high migration rate of the poor working people from villages to the city, the number of slum dwellers is also increasing every year. However, there is no data available on the present number of slums and slum population in the city.

Experts warned that if living condition of slum dwellers remains

neglected it would turn into a big threat to security as criminals mostly use slums as a safe haven.

Nurul Islam Nazem, professor of Geography and Environment at Dhaka University and secretary of CUS who did the study, said slum dwellers are inseparable from the city life because of there service but surprisingly the city has no cheap housing facility for them," Nazem said.

However, due to frequent eviction drives the characteristics of the slums in the city is changing over the years. About 15 years ago about 80 percent of the slums were on public land but in 2005 the researchers found 80 percent of slums on private land, the study shows.

He said for the last one decade or so NGOs are working on the slum dwellers' basic needs like pure water, sanitation and schooling, but these efforts are inadequate.

"Keeping next 30/40 years in mind, policymakers should come forward to produce a meaningful economic and social planning for the slums, otherwise it would be hard to save the city," he cautioned.

Mostafa Quaium Khan, a top official of Coalition for Urban Poor, an umbrella organisation of NGOs, said about 1,30,000 people were evicted from over 50 slums in Dhaka through drives between January 2003 and May 2007.

JAYWALKING AT SONARGAON CROSSING



Hundreds of pedestrians cross the intersection in front of Sonargaon Hotel blocking hundreds of speeding vehicles although there is an underpass within only 200 yards from the busy point. Traffic officials keep vigil all the day at the spot but they seem indifferent to the matter.