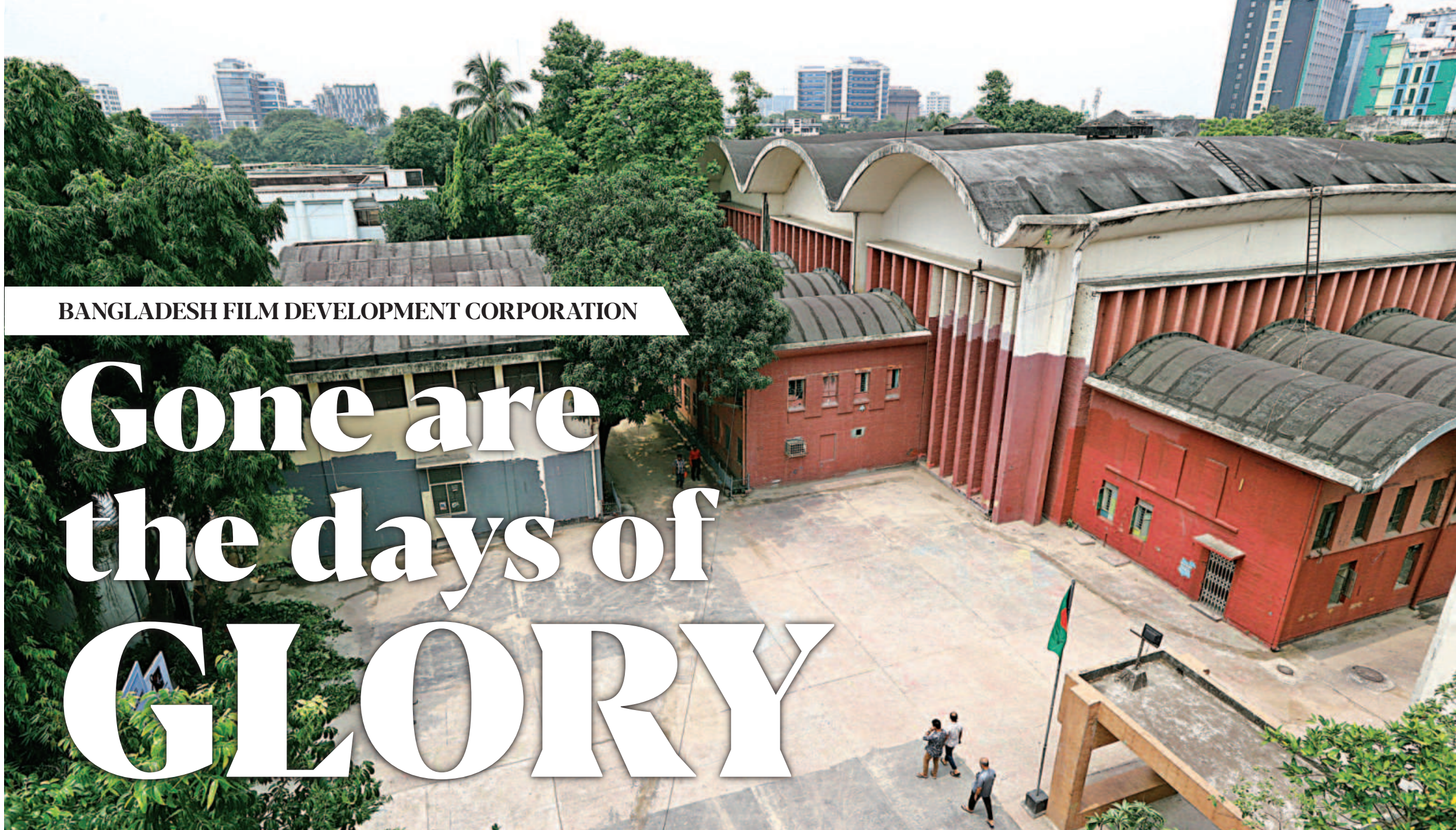




BANGLADESH FILM DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Gone are the days of GLORY

The once vibrant Bangladesh Film Development Corporation now wears a deserted look due to lack of activities.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ



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KAZI HAYAT
President of Bangladesh Film Directors Association.

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GIAS UDDIN SELIM
Noted Filmmaker

SUKANTA HALDER AND
ASIFUR RAHMAN

There was a time not so long ago when Bangladesh Film Development Corporation was abuzz with various activities -- from shooting films to dubbing and editing.

Starting from early in the morning, its premises, widely known as FDC, used to be packed with superstars, supporting staff and technicians working till midnight in a lively environment.

The traditional cue -- "light, camera, action" -- used to reverberate from different floors of FDC. It was making profits for quite some time after paying regular salaries and allowances to the officials and staff.

Those days, however, are gone. Established in 1957, the state-run corporation started losing its charm during the 2000s with fewer movies being produced every passing year. It started incurring heavy losses, particularly in 2007 and had to depend on government assistance to pay its staff.

In the last 16 years, FDC had a total loss of Tk 150.88 crore, according to its documents.

The situation only got worse. FDC had to borrow from the government to pay monthly salaries and bonuses to its 224 employees before Eid-ul-Fitr this year.

The reasons behind FDC's current state include a lack of readiness in adopting state-of-the-art technology, producing low-quality films, higher charge of its spaces than private-



Staffers are often seen passing idle time amid lack of work.



These structures still stand as a reminder of FDC's lost glory.

modern equipment. But now, it has lost its relevance.

"Back in 2011-2012, the filmmaking process went through a digital transformation. At that time, private companies began making films in digital format and shooting them with digital cameras," said an FDC official.

"However, FDC was not prepared for this transformation. This resulted in us losing our audience and consequently, revenues. We brought in digital instruments in 2014. It was too late by then. The private companies captured almost all the business," added the official, requesting anonymity.

Echoing a similar view, noted filmmaker Gias Uddin Selim said when the film industry shifted from analogue to digital after 2011, FDC took a long time to decide its course of action.

"The delay eventually knocked them out of the competition," he said. Although FDC bought modern equipment, there is a shortage of skilled human resources in technical sections like editing and dubbing, he added.

Renowned film director Kazi Hayat said, "I don't know if anyone is thinking about increasing the income

from the existing resources of FDC. I don't see anyone is concerned about it either."

He said he made several requests to the FDC authorities to take measures to reduce the time in purchasing equipment and complete the process quickly, but to no avail.

"The entire process of purchasing equipment was time-consuming. By the time FDC completed the process, more updated pieces of equipment hit the market. Naturally, filmmakers prefer the updated technology," said Hayat, also president of Bangladesh Film Directors Association.

Moreover, FDC charges a high amount for renting out the equipment which discourages the filmmakers, he said.

Morshedul Islam, another popular filmmaker, said what FDC lacks is planning. "They buy expensive cameras and unnecessary equipment for their interest."

Regarding FDC's shift system, he said, "Filmmaking is not possible in a fixed timetable like a government office schedule of 9:00am to 5:00pm. When we needed extra hours to complete shooting, we had to pay extra, increasing the production costs."

"There was a time when filmmakers had no choice but to go to FDC for shooting as it was done on celluloid film (typically the 35mm stock). But after the transformation into the digital format, many private firms started renting the equipment at cheaper rates," added Morshedul.

BFDC Managing Director Nuzhat Yeasmin said raw films and laboratories accounted for 85 percent of FDC's revenue in 2003, 2004 and 2005. However, due to the transformation from analogue to digital, FDC's income decreased significantly.

"FDC needs to pay around Tk 1 crore per month as salaries, allowances and other expenses to its officials and employees. On the contrary, the income of this corporation is around Tk 50 lakh only," she claimed.

TK 20.79CR OVERDUE FROM PRODUCERS

The total amount that 398 film producers, from 1980 to date, owe for technical support, floor rent and positive-negative purchase stands at Tk 20.79 crore.

Many film producers who took FDC's equipment on rent and used its other facilities did not pay them back.

FDC officials sent letters several times to these producers to retrieve the owed money but to no avail.

"Some letters came back to us as the producers gave us the wrong addresses. There is no other way for us to find them," said Hemayet Hossain, FDC's accounts officer.

"After failing to get the dues, we sued some of the producers," he added.

REVIVAL BID IN LIMBO

To bring back the past glory and make the institution profitable, FDC initiated two projects. However, one of them got delayed for three years.

In 2018, the government took up a Tk 322.77 crore project to build a 15-storeyed FDC complex for the corporation to become "self-dependent".

According to the project documents, the complex will have FDC's head office, a film archive and museum, shooting floors, rehearsal rooms, residential hotels, shopping malls, a swimming pool, a gymnasium and a multiplex.

The project was supposed to be completed by December 2021. However, as of now, only the basement of the complex has been completed.

In last 16 years, FDC had a total loss of Tk 150.88 crore

FDC had to borrow from govt to pay monthly salaries, bonuses to its 224 employees before Eid-ul-Fitr this year



Lack of maintenance has left this shooting spot in a sorry state.

BFDC MD Nuzhat said the complex is expected to be completed by 2024.

In 2015, the government took up a Tk 18.21 crore project to establish a film city named "Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Film City (Phase-I)" in Gazipur's Kaliakair. It was built on a portion of 105 acres of land donated by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman after the country's independence.

FDC was the implementing agency of the project and completed in June 2018, said an FDC official, requesting anonymity.

Filmmaker Kazi Hayat, however, said, "Some private shooting spots near the film city have become popular. The film city failed in that regard as it was developed without proper planning."

The second phase of the same project is now awaiting approval from the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecnc) meeting. Under the project, shooting spots and floors, and a post-production studio will also be built at the film city.

Nuzhat claimed that the film city would gain a vibrant environment after the completion of the project's second phase.

AT A GLANCE

Established in 1957

It's a state-run corporation

Started losing its charm during the 2000s

Started incurring losses

Had to depend on government assistance to pay staff

REASONS BEHIND CURRENT STATE

Lack of proper policy support

Unwilling to adopt state-of-the-art technology

Producing low-quality films

Higher charge of its spaces than private-owned studios

Rise of digital content



These days, people hardly visit the once-coveted destination.

owned studios, and the rise of the digital content, according to the FDC officials, staff, film directors and producers.

FDC started with a mission to support world-class movies through policy support, enhancing technical capacity, human resource development, and procurement of