

Filmmakers and Star Cineplex clash over industry priorities, who said what?

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RAKSHANDA RAHMAN MISHA

Earlier on May 3, two movies hit the screens—*Shyama Kabya*, directed by Badrul Anam Saud, and *Deadbody*, directed by Mohammad Iqbal. Both directors have accused Star Cineplex of favouring foreign films over Bangla cinema.

Badrul Anam Saud aired his concerns in a detailed post critiquing the movie theatre chain, while Mohammad Iqbal organised a human chain and press conference last Sunday (May 12), to protest against Star Cineplex's treatment of his movie *Deadbody*.

On Monday (May 13), Star Cineplex held a press conference at Dhaka Club to address and counter the allegations circulating in the media.

Mahboob Rahman Ruhel, chairman of Star Cineplex, stressed the organisation's commitment to Bangladeshi cinema. He expressed a desire for filmmakers to create movies similar to *Poran*, *Hawa*, *Priyotoma*, and *Surongo*, which have successfully drawn audiences to theatres.

Regarding the discontinuation of underperforming movies, Ruhel emphasised that Star Cineplex is a business with obligations such as electricity, sound systems, projection maintenance, and employee salaries to uphold. Therefore, they cannot continue screening films that fail to attract audiences.



so after a new agreement. However, we want to clarify a few things: the film itself was shot in a darker setting, which posed a lighting challenge for us. If the filmmakers had concerns, they could have approached us directly, and we would have accommodated them by shifting the screening to another hall. It's unfortunate that they chose to make accusations against us while seated in our lobby."

"With multiple halls, occasional issues can arise, but it shouldn't be blown out of proportion. The data clearly indicated that the film wasn't attracting audiences. If people aren't interested in watching it, there's no point in blaming us on social media," he added.

Previously, Star Cineplex faced criticism from filmmakers for terminating screenings of Eid-ul-Fitr films after only four weeks in theatres. Filmmakers such as Himel Ashraf, Gias Uddin Selim, and Mishuk Moni protested strongly against this decision. However, the cinema hall management subsequently began screening *Rajkumar* and *Kajol Rekha* in response to overwhelming demand.

This Eid-ul-Fitr, three other movies were also taken down from Star Cineplex as they couldn't fare well in theatres, they are - Kazi Hayat's *Green Card*, Chotku Ahmed's government-granted film *Ahare Jibon* and Fuad Chowdhury directorial *Meghna Komnya*.



PHOTOS: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED

Mahboob Rahman Ruhel, chairman of Star Cineplex.

"We operate on the principle of supply and demand. If a movie performs well, we will keep screening it. For example, after Eid, we brought back *Rajkumar* and *Kajol Rekha* due to popular demand. If certain directors are not actively

promoting their films, we cannot shoulder the responsibility for their lack of success," added the Star Cineplex chairman.

Earlier on Sunday, the creators of *Deadbody* held a press conference attended by prominent actor Omar Sani, Producers and Directors Association President Kazi Hayat, Combined Film Council Convenor Khorshed Alam Khosru, and director Delwar Jahan Jhantu.

Md Iqbal alleged that Star Cineplex has undermined his film, claiming that the management allocates morning showtimes to Bangladeshi films to prioritise peak times for foreign movies.

Kazi Hayat's *Green Card* was also removed from Star Cineplex this Eid. The director criticised Star Cineplex for its indifferent attitude towards Bangla films, suggesting that continued behaviour of this nature would lead to a cessation of movie offerings to the movie theatre chain.

Against such accusations, Chairman Mahboob stated, "This is entirely absurd. If a movie resonates with audiences, they will watch it regardless of the screening time. My target audience comprises the

middle class, upper middle class, and educated individuals. If filmmakers fail to produce content that appeals to this demographic, it's not my responsibility if their film fails."

He further explained that initially, he supported the Bangladeshi film industry by screening Tareque Masud's *Runway*, even when only 10-15 people attended. He aimed to introduce quality films to his audience. However, "Star Cineplex is a brand, and we cannot compromise on our quality," he highlighted.

Earlier, director Saud of *Shyama Kabya* also made similar allegations against the cinema's management, citing issues with projection quality and irregular scheduling.

Regarding the *Shyama Kabya* controversy, Mahboob acknowledged the allegations against Hall-3 but also criticised the filmmakers for addressing the issue publicly on social media instead of discussing it directly with the hall management.

"Yes, there was a minor issue with the projection in Hall-3 at the Bashundhara branch. Due to Covid-related restrictions, we were unable to upgrade the screen at that time and were planning to do



The recent exchanges between filmmakers and Star Cineplex highlight the complex dynamics at play within the Bangladeshi cinema industry. While allegations and counterarguments have fueled debate, it's evident that both parties share a common goal—the promotion and success of Bangla cinema. Ultimately, a vibrant and thriving Bangladeshi film scene hinges on the collective efforts of all involved, ensuring diverse cinematic experiences for audiences and sustained growth for the industry as a whole.

NEWS

Taskin named Shanto's deputy

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their World Cup campaign against Sri Lanka on June 8 in Dallas, the selectors have preferred to keep the in-form pacer in the squad.

"As per the information available to us, he [Taskin] will regain fitness at some point during the World Cup. That's why we have included him in the team," chief selector Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu told the media.

When asked about Taskin becoming the new vice-captain, Lipu said that it was the Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) decision to appoint him.

"He was a promising cricketer of his generation. He has been leading the team in one department and has been playing for the national team in different formats for a long time. Perhaps that's why the BCB considered him a deserving candidate."

The press conference got delayed by a little over half an hour yesterday, as the selectors were busy in last minute discussions about the side.

The apparent outcome of that

discussion was Saifuddin losing his place in the side to Tanzim Sakib.

"He [Saifuddin] was on our minds. We had formed a team in light of the BPL and we didn't make too many changes to it. Saifuddin is the only player from that squad who didn't make it in the final cut. In his place, Tanzim Sakib comes in," said the former Bangladesh captain.

The squad announcement also confirmed that Shakib Al Hasan will be the second player after India's Rohit Sharma to take part in all nine editions of the T20 World Cup.

The ace all-rounder is a crucial part of Bangladesh's plans in the tournament and unlike some previous editions where he led the side, the 37-year-old will play without any burden of leadership in what could be his swansong in the tournament.

This will also be the first time Bangladesh will be going in with a front-line leg spinner in a World Cup as Rishad Hossain has been named in the 15.

Tigers have earlier had the part-time leg-spin of Sabbir Rahman at their disposal in the 2014 and 2016 T20 World

Cups and the 2015 and 2019 ODI World Cups. Before Sabbir, they had the services of another part-time wrist spinner in Alok Kapali at the 2003 ODI World Cup and the 2007 T20 World Cup.

Six players - Tanzid Tamim, Towhid Hridoy, Jaker Ali, Tanvir Islam, Rishad Al Hasan, Towhid Hridoy, Mahmudullah, Jaker Ali, Tanvir Islam, Mahedi Hasan, Rishad Hossain, Mustafizur Rahman, Shoriful Islam, Tanzim Sakib.

The selectors have picked only two traveling reserves in pacer Hasan Mahmud and batter Afif Hossain.

Squad: Najmul Hossain Shanto (c), Taskin Ahmed (vc), Liton Das, Soumya Sarkar, Tanzid Tamim, Shakib Al Hasan, Towhid Hridoy, Mahmudullah, Jaker Ali, Tanvir Islam, Mahedi Hasan, Rishad Hossain, Mustafizur Rahman, Shoriful Islam, Tanzim Sakib.

Tax burden

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achieve its Tk 4.80 lakh crore revenue target for 2024-25 (FY25).

The target represents a 17 percent increase compared to this year's target and exceeds the NBR's average annual revenue growth of 11 percent over the past five years.

At yesterday's meeting at the Prime Minister's Office, NBR officials presented tax plans and received PM's approval for most proposals that focused on increasing revenue collections and reducing reliance on borrowing to implement the budget, according to officials aware of the developments.

The NBR is considering maintaining the current Tk 3.5 lakh tax exempt income threshold for the second consecutive year.

Stock investors might be taxed 5 percent to 25 percent on their capital gains, stemming from the sale of shares. Carbonated beverage manufacturers are likely to face a 5 percent tax on their turnover in FY25, up from the existing 3 percent, said a senior official.

The NBR aims to collect Tk 1.77 lakh crore in income tax in the next fiscal year, a 20 percent year-on-year increase, according to officials.

It is likely to remove exemptions and reduce VAT benefits on nearly 20 items to increase the tax-to-GDP ratio. Bangladesh has one of the lowest tax-to-GDP ratios in the world.

The revenue administration is expected to raise the supplementary duty on mobile phone calls from the current 15 percent. It may impose VAT on metro rail travel fares, the officials added.

Bureaucrats vexed

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of them may get fresh contracts because the policymakers are satisfied with their performance.

Besides, the secretaries themselves are lobbying hard for reappointments, several bureaucrats said, adding that it is the prime minister who will make the final call.

Public Security Division's Senior Secretary Mustafizur Rahman's contract with the government ends on May 25.

On May 23 last year, a day before his tenure ended, Mustafizur was promoted as senior secretary. On May 25, he received a one-year contract. Similarly, several other secretaries were blessed at the end of their tenure.

"Even if Mustafizur does not get an extension again, there are chances that he will be appointed to another key position," said a senior officer, requesting anonymity.

Commerce ministry's Senior Secretary Tapan Kanti Ghosh's contract expires on May 17. He has already been a secretary for over five years.

Usually, a senior minister runs the commerce ministry. But after the January 7 election, a state minister was given the charge of the ministry.

"As an experienced official, Tapan may get a renewed contract," said an additional secretary of the ministry.

Defence ministry's Senior Secretary Golam Hasibul Alam's one-year contract will end on May 30 and financial institutions division Secretary Sheikh Mohammad Salim Ullah's on May 19.

At least 18 other ministry secretaries will reach the end of their regular and contractual tenures this year. Among them are the principal secretary to the prime minister and the cabinet secretary, two of the most significant bureaucrats.

PM's Principal Secretary Tofazzel Hossain Miah's contractual appointment ends on July 4 and Cabinet Secretary Mahbob Hossain's on October 13.

According to public administration ministry officials, Tofazzel may get an extension. At present, he is one of the most influential officers in the bureaucracy, they said.

Besides, the previous principal secretary got multiple extensions. If

the current one is reappointed, there is a strong chance that the cabinet secretary will too, they added.

If Mahbob is not reappointed as the cabinet secretary, Mesbah Uddin Chowdhury, the public administration senior secretary, may get the post, said the sources.

Mesbah, the most senior among the secretaries on regular tenure, will retire on December 30.

Shipping ministry's Senior Secretary Mostafa Kamal, Election Commission (EC) Secretary Jahangir Alam and Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs Senior Secretary Mashur Rahman may get key positions.

Religion Affairs Secretary A Hamid Zamadder, Land Secretary Khalilur Rahman, Cultural Affairs Secretary Khalil Ahmed, Information Secretary Humayun Kabir Khandaker, Primary Education Secretary Farid Ahmed, and IMED Secretary Abul Kashem Md Mohiuddin are among the officials who are supposed to retire.

DISAPPOINTMENTS

Several senior officials said the contractual appointments in each of the top positions deprive at least four other officials - eligible to get promoted - who are at the final stage of their career.

"The number of contractual appointments has increased in recent years. But now they are getting contracts multiple times. This will weaken the administration in the long run," said an additional secretary.

Another official said, "Contractual appointments can be given in technical posts. We urge the government to not give contractual appointments to the administrative positions."

Former secretary Badiur Rahman said, "What we are seeing is the top officers availing the opportunity of contracts. It would be difficult to break this cycle if senior officials do not stop seeking such opportunities."

Contacted, Public Administration Minister Forhad Hossain told The Daily Star that the government gives contractual appointments to those it trusts to perform the duties.

"It's not possible to say who will get contractual appointments. The government tries to run the administration with a blend of senior and junior officials to ensure that people get the best service," he said.

Cattle for Eid

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brought under insurance policy which will protect livestock owners from loss due to death or disability of their animals.

"We often hear about theft. If the cattle is registered, this will also reduce theft cases," Saha added.

Additionally, details of any newborn calves will be promptly recorded in the database within a few days.

Initially, 16 upazilas with high cattle production have been identified for registration. The upazilas are - Agailjhara of Barishal, Nazirpur of Pirojpur, Karnaphuli of Chattogram, Adarsha Sadar of Cumilla, Tungipara of Gopalganj, Mollar Hat of Bagerhat, Dumuria of Khulna, Madarganj of Jamalpur, Trishal of Rajshahi, Shahjapur of Sirajganj, Chirirbandar of Dinajpur, Pirganj of Rangpur, South Sunamganj and Sylhet Sadar.

Meanwhile, registration of 96 cattle has been completed in some farms in Shahjapur of Sirajganj, said Billal Hossain, upazila livestock officer.

Abdur Rahim, project director (joint secretary) of LDDP, said, "If we export meat or livestock products abroad, the importers want to know all the history about the cattle including its diseases. The database will be helpful for exporting meat."

Bureaucrats

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Legal Aid Committee. But to whom is the chairman responsible? To the National Legal Aid and Services Organization or the chief justice? This part is not clarified," he said.

He also said the lawyers who are providing services to the litigants are also being deprived. He said he learned from three former chairmen of the Supreme Court Legal Aid Committee that the budget is very low.

In his written speech, the chief justice said helpless litigants are constantly facing physical, mental, and financial losses due to long delays in the disposal of cases, and one of the ways to resolve this problem is to settle the cases through alternative dispute resolution (ADR) system.

"The judiciary of Bangladesh has become hunchbacked due to an intolerable backlog of cases. Against the huge number of cases, the number of judges is very insufficient. As a result, people seeking justice are being affected. I believe the country's legal aid offices can play a significant role in this regard," he said.