

■ CAREER ■

# Unreliable internet connectivity and its impact on BANGLADESHI FREELANCERS

**TINATH ZAEBA**

The rise of freelancing has reshaped the global workforce, providing countless opportunities for individuals to build careers independently. In Bangladesh, the freelancer community has flourished, with over 10,50,000 professionals working in fields like content creation, graphic design, digital marketing, software development, and so on. Yet, the nationwide internet blackout earlier in July reflected ongoing issues with internet connectivity – problems that have always been present but were really highlighted during the outage.

Most freelancers in Bangladesh use platforms like Upwork and Fiverr. These platforms allow them to set up profiles, offer their services, and set their own rates. Success on these platforms often depends on ratings from clients. Better ratings lead to better visibility and the ability to charge higher rates according to their worth.

Harun Ar Rashid, 35, a freelancer on Upwork and Fiverr, was one of many whose work was severely impacted during the five-day internet blackout during the quota reform protests in July. "I had three pending gigs that I had already completed, but I couldn't submit them before the internet went down. The clients cancelled the orders due to my lack of response, and all my hours of work were wasted."

Rashid also spoke about the effect this had on his ratings saying, "As I couldn't communicate with my prospective clients and had to leave discussions halfway through, they left lower ratings on my profile, which will impact my ability to secure future clients. Fiverr is yet to address this issue."

The internet blackout also sparked discussions about whether freelancers are too dependent on these platforms. Freelancing is supposed to offer freedom and control over work, but platforms like Upwork and Fiverr sort of act as gatekeepers. They control the flow of work,

visibility of profiles, and payment processes. Freelancers' success often depends on algorithms they can't control. Without other ways to reach clients or generate work, freelancers rely on these platforms, which can limit their independence and potential for success.

Despite these issues, many stay with these platforms because they offer access to a global client base, even though direct client outreach might offer more freedom and higher earnings.

The internet blackout also made freelancers reflect on their everyday frustrations. For them, the internet isn't just a convenience; it's their

Bangladesh, internet reliability is a constant issue."

Bangladesh's internet relies on submarine cables to connect to global networks. These cables can be damaged by natural disasters or human activities like fishing and shipping, leading to service disruptions. Long downtimes due to maintenance work being done on these cables are also not uncommon. Even when they're working, bandwidth limitations cause congestion, especially during peak times, slowing down speeds.

The domestic fibre optic network is growing, especially in rural areas where fast and reliable internet is still hard to come by. Frequent power outages and load-shedding only add to the problem.

As a result, they have no choice but to deal with the fact that the infrastructure doesn't always meet their needs, forcing them to work under less-than-ideal conditions even when they are connected. For those whose work relies on a stable internet connection, like digital marketers or graphic designers, any interruption can disrupt their entire workflow.

For many freelancers, working under these conditions means living with uncertainty. The blackout in July was a harsh reminder of how fragile the system is and how easily their work can be disrupted by both major events and everyday problems. Freelancers have been

dealing with these issues for years, often relying on costly and unreliable mobile data as a backup.

After the internet was restored, freelancers had to play catch-up, renegotiating deadlines and fixing client relationships damaged by days of silence. The core issues – slow internet speeds, unreliable service, and costly alternatives – still need to be addressed. As Bangladesh moves forward with its digital development, it needs to tackle these systemic problems to support its growing freelance community.

*Tinath Zaeba is an optimistic daydreamer, a cat mom of five, and a student of Economics at North South University.*

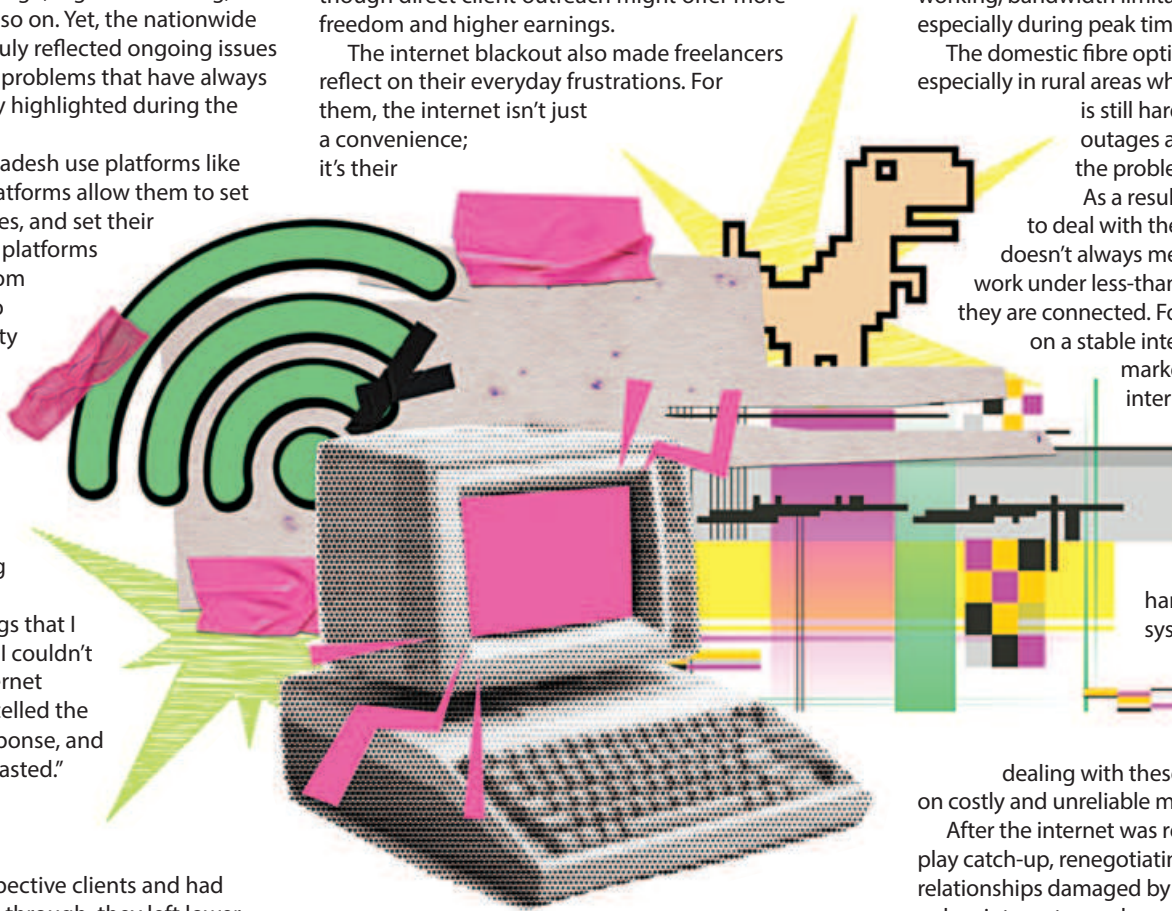


ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN

lifeline. Problems are made worse due to frequent load-shedding and unreliable internet connectivity, which interrupt work at crucial times.

Tanaz Masaba, 28, a freelance SEO content writer on Upwork, shared her frustration, "There's nothing worse than losing hours of work due to load shedding. And in



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