

The challenges the film certification board faces



STRIKING THE CHORD

Elita Karim
is a singer and journalist.

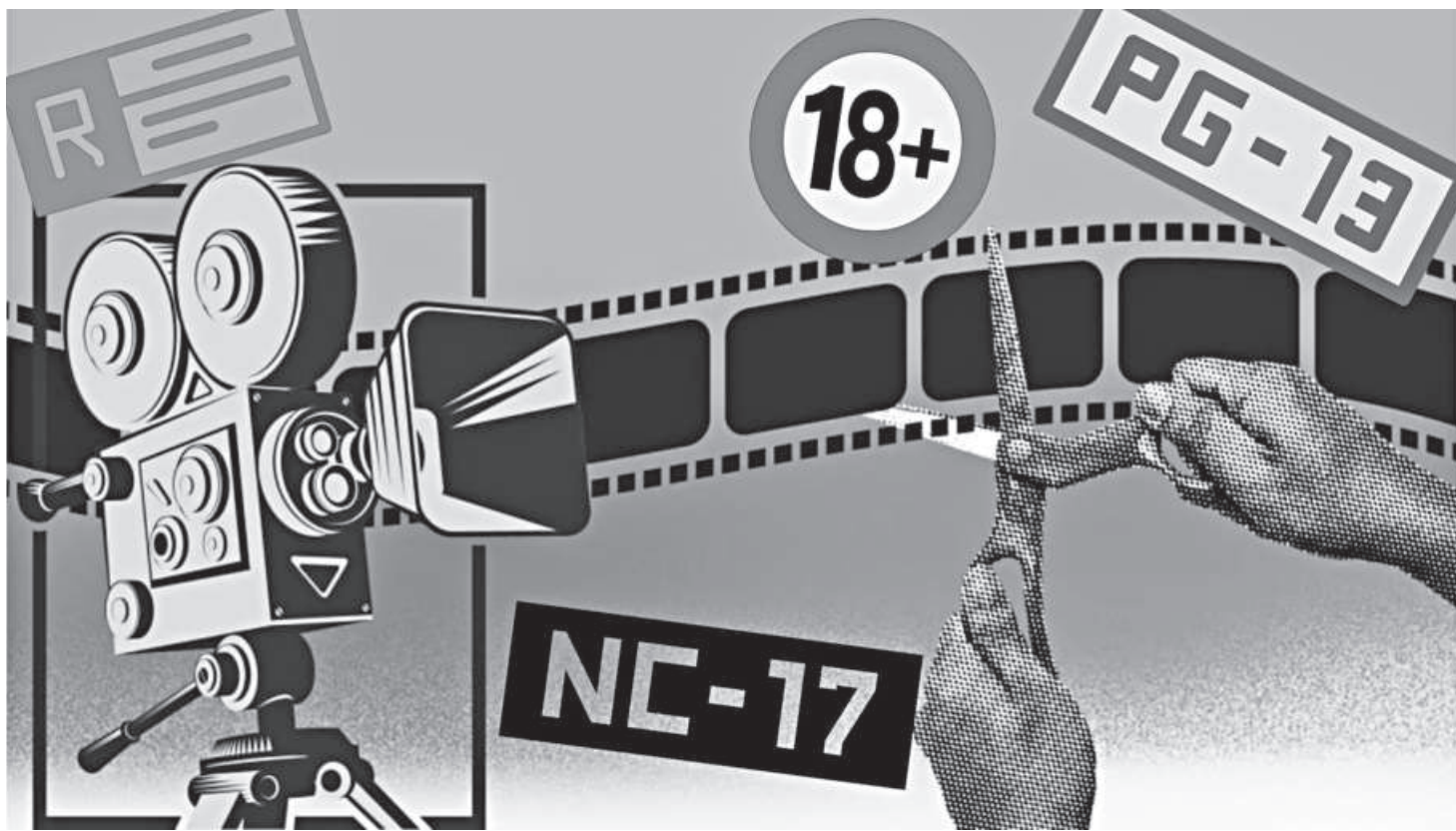
ELITA KARIM

Bangladesh is in the process of changing. Some call it progress, some term it disrespecting the past, while many seem to be showing the courage to face challenges that are common during transitions—painful, yet necessary. Changes are hard for sure, and one might admit that it is easier for things to remain as they have for centuries, for life to go on as it does in Bruegel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*. It was, however, the Irish playwright and critic George Bernard Shaw who said that "progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything."

Ever since September 22, 2024, when the Bangladesh Film Censor Board was dissolved and the Bangladesh Film Certification Board was established, filmmakers and creators alike have been waiting for a positive change. As seen during major transitions all over the world, organisations go through reshaping operations—to archive, discard and eventually introduce new ideas. Similarly, the new film certification board has been trying to do the same: pave new avenues, update policies, and learn more, in the process, about the survival techniques of the Bangladeshi film industry. But most importantly, the new committee is also trying to figure out ways to release the films that have been gathering dust for several years.

The basic difference between a censor board for films and a certification board is that of creating limits where content is concerned. "While one has the power to restrict the showcasing of movies according to the censorship act of 1963, the other analyses the content, and certifies releases for appropriate audiences based on age," says Rafiqul Anwar Russell, an indie filmmaker and member of the current board. According to the rules or *bidhimala* created in 1977 and 1985 based on the act, the censor board had the power to either restrict a film or let it go with a clearance certificate.

The Censorship of Films Act, 1963, composed of board members designated by the government, would examine, review and certify films for public screening, adds Russell. According to Section 3 of the 1963 act, the board could basically determine if a film was



VISUAL: STAR

viewable or right for the general audience or not. "In a nutshell, it was either yes or no from the board—if a film would be allowed to run or not," adds Russell.

In 2023, the government decided to amend the act, calling it the Bangladesh Chalachitra Certification Act, 2023. The newly formed film certification board focuses more on a "rating system" where films are rated and made available for age-appropriate audiences. This system is followed in countries like the US, UK and also in India. "Some of the most successful and biggest industries have been following the certification system for films for years," says Russell.

"Films do get pulled out even under the certification system, and this has happened in

many developed industries as well," he adds. In rare cases, certain films were pulled out or not allowed to be released due to extreme levels of violence or nudity or even attacks on certain communities and minorities. However, according to Russell, while a censor board would restrict the release of at least 50-60 percent of films due to the existing rules related to the 1963 act, the certification system would still allow at least 90 percent of the films or more to be released, as long as they are

1985. "But it is definitely the mentality. We ask ourselves the questions: how and where do we want to see Bangladeshi films in the future? How much freedom do Bangladeshi filmmakers actually enjoy? And so much more. But there are some bigger issues that we have to overcome, which is forming the *bidhimala* or the set of regulations explaining the 2023 certification act. We are still following the explanations provided to us in 1977 and 1985. As per the constitution, if a set of regulations

adds filmmaker Russell. "Because the new act is still under construction, we have no choice but to follow the rules from 1977 and 1985 when it comes to reviewing films. Currently, we are also studying film certification acts and regulations of the more developed industries around the world and trying to implement them within our system."

There is also the issue of trying to secure access to the films which were restricted or "banned" for some reason or another by the previous regime. Quazi Nawshaba Ahmed, actor, voice artiste and also one of the committee members of the certification board, says that the evidence of certain films being "officially banned" during the past regime is missing. "Of course, there were observations," she says. "The current certification board is taking the necessary steps to ensure that films don't stay in a 'hold' status. Only a few films are currently with the 'appeal' division, and those fall outside the scope of the board's work."

"We still do not have access to these films," says Russell. "It is necessary to review them so that the actual reason behind the restrictions could be understood. That would help the current board take proper steps to move forward as well."

The complications do not end there. For instance, Nawshaba says, "Production houses must clear all payments due to technicians and actors before the film is submitted for certification. A clearance certificate from the relevant industry association should be a mandatory document during the certification process, ensuring transparency and fairness in the payment of all professionals involved." She also emphasises animal welfare in films so that if animals are used in a film, it must be ensured that no harm is inflicted on them. The certification board must have the authority to take legal action against those responsible, if an animal's health is compromised due to the shoot. Scenes involving animal cruelty should be simulated through animation or VFX to prevent real harm, she adds. She also mentions including strict criteria to address the logical and illogical use of tobacco and alcohol on screen and speaks about how the certification board should consist of a diverse panel of members representing different sections of society.

Clearly, hopeful outcomes from the new establishment will take months or years of work, research and the final formation of the act and its accompanying set of regulations. One can either choose to be fearful of the many challenges and obstacles that are springing up like mushrooms, or simply embrace these changes to create a better Bangladesh for the future, as intended. After all, as Leo Tolstoy writes, "True life is lived when tiny changes occur."

WORLD CITIES DAY

Cities should be for people, not cars



Debra Efroymsen
is executive director of the Institute of Wellbeing, Bangladesh.

DEBRA EFROYMSON

People flock to cities, despite all the traffic congestion and pollution, for a reason: cities offer opportunities that don't exist in smaller towns and villages, whether those be educational, professional or treatment-related. Once in the city, people accept the downsides in return for the benefits. Yet, our grumbling is constant and our ability to institute positive change is far less so.

A lot of factors go into making a city liveable, including affordable housing, decent infrastructure and services (sewage, electricity, waste disposal, etc), abundant open spaces and green spaces, availability of good jobs, education, healthcare, and so on. While safe drinking water is vital, so is clean air; we need not just a decent home but the possibility of sleeping at night as well. The existence of quality schools, healthcare and public space is of limited use if we can't access them safely and conveniently.

Too often, cities are destroyed before they get a chance to deliver a decent life through their overemphasis on mobility, particularly the movement and storage of cars and other motorised vehicles. When we design our cities for the comfort and convenience of cars, it is almost impossible to provide the above-mentioned qualities for people. Cars are simply too expensive, space-consuming, inefficient, polluting and dangerous to be good co-habitants with people.

"Cars were an invention to make our lives better," commented one of my interns the other day. "If they're making our lives worse, shouldn't we reconsider what we have them for?"

Theoretically, cars are a fast way to move about. In reality, as cars become more widely used, traffic congestion increases. While the average traffic speed in Dhaka was 21km/h in 2007, in 2022 it was a mere 4.8km/h. That just happens to be the average walking speed. A cyclist, in comparison, can easily go 30km/h. Imagine you were in charge of



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FILE PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

allocating road space for different users. On what basis would you allocate it? Would you give the most to the elite, to the most polluting vehicles, the most space-hogging, the most dangerous? Or would you try to have a fair allocation by the number of trips per mode of vehicles, with a focus on encouraging non-polluting trips and penalising the polluting ones? Surely, an efficient use of road space would factor into your decision.

Looking at the cars piled up on the streets of Dhaka, it is easy to believe that most trips are made by car. In fact, cars account for only a small minority or about 11 percent of trips. And yet cars occupy 70 percent of road

space. Pedestrians are lucky to get a narrow footpath, and cyclists get no infrastructure at all. The congestion caused by cars is not just a nuisance; it carries real costs: a loss of 82 lakh working hours daily in the capital due to traffic, or the equivalent of Tk 139 crore. Wish you had cleaner air to breathe? Air pollution is far higher in motorised streets than non-motorised ones. And yet, Dhaka and other Bangladeshi cities grow ever more congested, polluted, unsafe and unpleasant. Rather than limiting the number of cars imported and implementing other proven restrictions like charging more for car parking, we actually encourage car ownership through loans, ample free or low-cost streetside parking, and the insistence that apartment buildings and businesses provide, at exorbitantly high cost, free parking. The number of registered private cars up until 2010 was nearly 2.2 lakh; by June 2020, it rose to over 3.7 lakh, according to the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) data. In the same period, motorcycles increased from over 7.5

noisy and miserable each year. Cars occupy an inordinate amount of space and stubbornly refuse to leave.

And yet, modern cities like Copenhagen, Vancouver, Hong Kong and Singapore show that it is possible to control cars and restore liveability to cities: less pollution, less noise, more parks and green spaces, better conditions for walking and cycling, and thus less congestion. Less space and fewer resources devoted to cars also make it easier to deliver all the other amenities that people desire and need in cities.

Surely, as we observe World Cities Day today, it is time to greatly restrict the use of private motorised vehicles and make our cities more liveable.

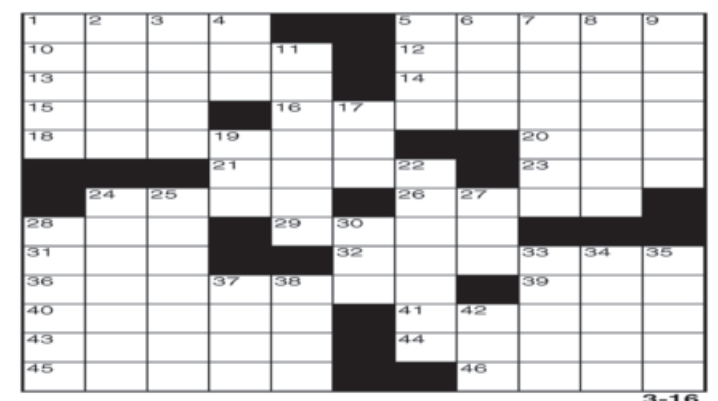
CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Storage site
- 5 Duel count
- 10 "The Taming of the Shrew" city
- 12 Before, in Bordeaux
- 13 Star in Orion
- 14 Half of deca-
- 15 Mammie's mate
- 16 Flattery, Irish-style
- 18 Wheeled stretcher
- 20 Mine yield
- 21 Son of Hera
- 23 Went ahead
- 24 Captivated
- 26 Bill stamp
- 28 Crazy —
- 29 Indian gown
- 31 Qty.
- 32 Bamm-Bamm's dad
- 36 Competition, for short
- 39 Log chopper
- 40 "Tomorrow" singer
- 41 Writer Jong
- 43 Can't live without
- 44 Reef visitor
- 45 Useful skill
- 46 Some toothpastes

DOWN

- 1 Parsley unit
- 2 Short poem
- 3 Yard tool
- 4 Bill stamp
- 5 One of a bear trio
- 6 Declare
- 7 Cheese-filled pastry
- 8 Came in
- 9 Didn't budge
- 11 Einstein and Sabin
- 17 Caustic stuff
- 19 Catch some z's
- 22 Used an aerosol
- 24 Punk pioneers
- 25 Harmonizes
- 27 Melody
- 28 Samurai sword
- 30 Justice Fortas
- 33 Too trusting
- 34 Shine
- 35 Age units
- 37 Carousel, e.g.
- 38 Comfy home
- 42 Equip



SUNDAY'S ANSWERS



WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO
dsopinion@gmail.com.