



SHARMIN JOYA

Lighting plays a crucial role in filmmaking. It sets the mood, directs the viewer's attention, and enhances the narrative. Imagine a movie illuminated only with flat, white light—like the sterile environment of a hospital. It lacks ambience, mood, and emotional guidance for the audience. Behind this essential aspect of filmmaking are the lighting technicians, whose efforts often go unnoticed. In Bangladesh, however, these technicians face an uncertain future, as the industry battles deep financial challenges.

Bimol Das, the owner of Bijoy Media and a veteran in the field, paints a grim picture of the current state of the lighting sector. "Our job is very much dependent on the production, and if there is no project, we have no work," he states. For those in the lighting sector, their livelihood is tied to daily wages, and with fewer projects to work on, it's a struggle to make ends meet.

Das points out that lighting companies in Bangladesh operate on a shoestring budget, and in the current condition, many are relying on their own funds to survive. "Since there are no investments for any big projects since the July Uprising, most lighting companies are trying to cope with their own resources," he explains. To support their staff during this difficult time, companies like Bijoy Media have resorted to providing meals and other forms of assistance. "We're dividing people into rosters to make sure everyone gets the opportunity to earn a minimum wage and survive," Das adds.

However, the problem runs deeper. The technicians in this sector often come from humble backgrounds with limited educational qualifications, and for many, the passion for the entertainment media

is what drew them into the industry. "They may come to this sector out of passion, but their bread and butter come from this work. They can't just switch to another profession," explains Das. As it takes years of experience to become proficient, losing these technicians would lead to a scarcity of skilled labour. Bimol Das divulges he even had to sell property to keep the businesses afloat, while other companies have sold their equipment or shut down altogether.

Das, who has been working in the industry since 1980, has never witnessed a situation as dire as this. "Since I began, there has not been such a bad situation, not even during the pandemic," he recalls. According to him, work has decreased by 75 percent compared to pre-crisis levels, and if investors don't step in, there seems to be little hope for the future. "We need an elected government to intervene and provide hope, otherwise everything will remain at a standstill," he warns.

M Salam Chaudhary, president of the Shooting Light Owners Association and owner of Alomohol, shares similar concerns. "In regular times, each company would supply their best numbers of technicians, up to 100 crew per day to different shooting locations. But now, with fewer projects, there's hardly any work, and not even opportunity for over five to work."

Salam also faces financial strain, as his company must pay Tk 70,000 as rent for office spaces and additionally, there are costs for maintaining godowns even when there is little business. "It's a big challenge for us to survive. Our manpower has been reduced by half of what we had earlier, these crew members are leaving and we are not able to keep them, and many have switched professions," he explains.

He also reveals that the income per project has plummeted. "The contract amount which we previously got for Tk25,000 for each production is now being offered for only Tk10,000. How do we survive like this?"

He shared that he is now striving with bank loans of nearly Tk35 lakhs and living in uncertainty, yet hoping for a good time to return. "There are around 23 shooting lighthouses, and in this critical situation only a few of them such as Bijoy Media, or Light House are surviving, the rest have



PHOTOS: SHEIKH MEHEDI MORSHED



already either closed down or shrunk their business."

The situation is no better for SM Mujibur Rahman, the owner of Light House (since 1998), one of the largest lighting companies in the industry. "We are unable to clear the payments for our staff, but we're still trying to cope," admits Rahman, who has been a part of the industry since 1995. His company, which employs around 70 people, used to generate an income of Tk 30,000-35,000 per month. Now, that amount has dropped to Tk 15,000-18,000.

Ibrahim Shahriar, the secretary of the Lightman Association, and the owner of SS Media (since 2016), highlights the undervaluation and neglect of technicians in the industry. "The light technicians are the most neglected and discriminated against in the industry. They are often treated poorly, especially when they go for outdoor shoots. They get non-AC cars, hotels with poor facilities and are forced to adjust to extreme conditions," says Ibrahim.

Despite their hard work, many technicians receive only small wages—around Tk 1,000 for small screen projects and Tk 1,200 for larger projects. "Even a decade ago, we were

respected and valued by the fraternity, but sadly it is deteriorating with each passing day."

Shahriar's frustration is evident when he reflects on how financially unsustainable the job has become. "Our call time is at 5am, and we work for 18-20 hours a day. If these technicians pull a rickshaw for half a day, they would earn the same amount, with more time for rest and family," he points out. Many of his skilled workers have already left the industry in search of alternate options, such as rickshaw pulling or selling vegetables, just to make a living. "From a workforce of 50, I'm now left with just 20 people," he shares.

In his career, he has worked in over 200 films, some of which include *Srabon Megher Din*, *Guerilla*, *Joyjatra*, *Alpha*, *Runway*, and *Priyotoma*, among others.

The lack of consistent work and proper compensation has led to a significant depletion of skilled labour, making it harder for companies to maintain their operations. As these technicians are often the backbone of film productions, this loss is a blow to the industry's future. The combination of financial struggles, undervaluation, and poor working conditions has pushed many talented technicians to the brink.

The challenges faced by the lighting sector in Bangladesh reflect broader issues within the media industry, where workers are often underpaid and overworked. Unless there is significant intervention from investors or the government, many fear that this crucial part of the film and television industry may not survive. For now, all the workers and company owners can do is wait and hope for a change—waiting for the light at the end of the tunnel.

NEWS

A law that gagged

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under the CSA, according to data collected by Centre for Governance Studies, a think tank.

These figures do not include the cases filed for sexual harassment, blackmail and fraud.

Of the 5,000 plus accused, nearly half (2,308) was prosecuted for social media posts deemed as critical of the government, office holders or elected representatives. Of them, at least 219 named and more than 200 unnamed people were charged for criticising former prime minister Sheikh Hasina, the CGS data show.

Journalists and opposition political party leaders suffered the most under the law.

For example, one in every three of those accused under the DSA and one in every four of those accused under the CSA were journalists. At least 239 journalists were prosecuted under the DSA specifically for publishing news or for social media posts, according to CGS data.

About a third of the accused under DSA and more than half of the accused

under CSA are politicians.

The DSA had a section that criminalised "hurting religious sentiments" with non-bailable provisions. Out of the 99 people charged for this offence, 44 percent belonged to the religious minorities, particularly those from the Hindu community.

As of August 2024, at least 5,818 cases were ongoing with eight cyber tribunals throughout the country, according to a law ministry press release issued on September 30.

Of them, 1,340 cases are related to "speech-based offence" – 879 under trial and 461 under investigation, the press release said.

For instance, activist Didarul Alam was arrested after his social media post about the disparity in the government relief distribution during the coronavirus pandemic in 2021. Didarul said he was interrogated blindfolded for seven hours. He languished in jail for five months.

Separately, 11 people, including writer Mushtaq Ahmed (who died in prison), cartoonist Ahmed Kabir

Kishore, Swedish-Bangladeshi journalist Tasneem Khalil who runs Netra News, US-based journalist Shahed Alam, were charged with "spreading rumours and carrying out anti-government activities".

Jagannath University student Khadijatul Kubra did not even post anything on social media.

She was arrested at the age of 17 simply for hosting a Facebook webinar, where a guest, Delwar Hossain, a retired army officer, made some critical remarks. Delwar, an expatriate, was also accused in the case.

She languished in jail for nearly 15 months, and walked out of jail on November 20, 2023, after the Supreme Court finally granted her bail.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, she described her ordeal during the time, saying it seriously affected her study and her life's trajectory.

She termed the government decision to abolish the law as a victory for the victims who suffered under the law.

"We hope that all such draconian laws will be abolished," she said.

Govt won't tolerate any attacks

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"There had been such a practice over the last 15 years, but the interim government did not say anything. If we thought that a news item was wrong, we mentioned it politely."

The press secretary said some journalists have spread rumours intentionally, but the interim government is not bothered by it at all.

"We are fully committed to the independence of the media. We did

not ask anyone not to file a report or why a particular report was published."

Asked about the removal of 64 district correspondents of Bangladesh Television and cancellation of accreditation cards of some journalists, Shafiqul said the BTV authorities will be able to say about it.

He said accreditation cards are scrapped by the information ministry which will be able to mention the

specific reasons.

About threats to some newspapers, Azad Majumder, deputy press secretary to the chief adviser, said the Editors' Council issued a statement in this regard which is being reviewed by the government.

These threats are being issued by a quarter, and the government has already noticed it, Shafiqul said, adding that they have already provided them with security.

expatriates.

The unique strength of the interim government almost wholly due to the global goodwill and admiration of Chief Adviser Muhammad Yunus has been its absolute claim to legitimacy within Bangladesh and beyond. That the Nobel peace laureate is held in high esteem could not have been more evident than at the events during the UN General Assembly in New York in September. He was greeted and embraced by world leaders who pledged their full support for the father of social business as the leader of Bangladesh. The incumbents would do well to leverage their legitimacy and proceed quickly with the reforms leading to an election.

Typhoon Yinxing slams into northern Philippines

AFP, Manila

Typhoon Yinxing slammed into the northeast tip of the Philippines yesterday, uprooting trees and sending building materials flying, weeks after another storm left at least 150 people dead.

More than 21,000 people across 200 villages in Cagayan province were evacuated in the hours before the mid-afternoon landfall, provincial disaster official Rueli Rapsing said.

"There is debris flying all around. Here in Gonzaga, an entire hamburger stand flew off and the winds are ripping open the shop doors at the

public market," Rapsing told AFP by phone from Gonzaga, a town near coastal Santa Ana.

Yinxing is the third storm in less than a month to threaten the Philippines after Severe Tropical Storm Trami and Super Typhoon Kong rey together left 158 people dead, the national disaster agency said, with most of that tally attributed to Trami.

Packing maximum sustained wind speeds of 175 kilometres (109 miles) per hour and gusts up to 240 kph, the typhoon struck the coastal town of Santa Ana and nearby areas, unleashing heavy rain and ripping off parts of houses.

Jubo League leader

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an electricity pole and beat him up with sticks and iron rods, said witnesses.

Later, Saidur's family members rescued him in critical condition. He was rushed to Natore Sadar Hospital. As his condition deteriorated, Saidur was moved to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital on November 2 where he died around 5:30pm on Wednesday, said his family members and police.

His family and AL men alleged that Kabir Hossain Kangal, vice-president of Natore Jubo Dal, the youth front of the BNP, led the attack on Saidur.

"We learnt that Kabir led the attack on Saidur, who was tortured brutally. Many people were present there at that time. But none dared to rescue Saidur. We want a fair investigation into the incident and seek justice,"

Delhi sees Hasina

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(International Society for Krishna Consciousness), a Hindu religious organisation. It sparked anger among the local Hindus, said police and local sources.

Locals attacked the trader and when law enforcers went there to rescue him, the crowd hurled brick

chunks and chemicals at them injuring nine policemen and five army personnel.

At least five locals were also injured when security forces charged truncheons to disperse the mob.

On Wednesday, Kotwali police arrested 49 people in this regard.

Major change

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The foreign adviser said, "Let's not speculate. We'll watch for the first two months. Then we'll see what steps the Trump administration takes and work with the US based on that."

He said the various issues, related to the US-Bangladesh ties, that were discussed with the Biden administration were also discussed with the previous Trump administration of 2017-2021.

"Let's see. First we'll establish communication and then we'll see how it goes."

About his attendance at the Ministerial Session of the High-Level Conference on counter-terrorism in Kuwait on November 2-3, he said there are increased anti-terrorism activities but there has also been a rise in terrorist activities.

"We need to remove the root causes of terrorism."

BNP vows to safeguard

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On this day in 1975, during a period of political unrest, soldiers and civilians jointly freed then-Chief of Army Staff Ziaur Rahman from captivity in Dhaka Cantonment, clearing the way for him to assume power.

Fakhrul said the fascist Awami League government had repeatedly plotted and resorted to repressive actions to eliminate the BNP.

He alleged that the Awami League had falsely implicated 60 lakh people, subjected around 700 to enforced disappearance, and killed several thousand others in its efforts to establish a one party rule and fascism. "But by the grace of Allah, fascism and hegemonic forces have been defeated for the third time in Bangladesh through the student-led mass movement in 2024," Fakhrul added.

In response to a question, Fakhrul said the interim government indeed played an effective role over the past three months.

"They have done many things and continue to do so. If we all cooperate with them, they will be able to hold the election at the appropriate and logical time to meet the challenges facing the nation," the BNP leader said.