

On September 19, Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani condemned the ongoing diplomatic crisis and blockade by their neighbours (and the Maldives, for some reason unbeknownst to all possible rationality) in a speech almost as long as his name. This was met with what all speeches at the UN General Assembly are met with—about half the room politely applauding to hide the fact that they were not listening to the translator in their ear, and the other half not bothering to put in that much effort, as it would mean actually having to do anything other than getting paid to sit in New York in a vegetative state. Half an hour later, President Donald Trump voiced some naïve drivel about how confident he was that the problem would be resolved soon, mirroring a plethora of US Presidents who have said this about the Middle East for the last few decades [and as we know, they were all always right]. This was eventually forgotten roughly 19 seconds later when President Trump cheerfully announced the imminent utter annihilation of North Korea while humming an Elton John track.

Qatar being sent to a corner without dinner came all too suddenly in June. Its neighbouring Gulf States placed an embargo to discipline it, as until then



CARTOON: CARLOS LATUFF

THE BLOCKADE AGAINST QATAR BACKING THE WRONG TERRORISTS

BAREESH HASAN CHOWDHURY

Qatar had probably been the least fundamentally damaged state in the region, which mind you, when speaking of the Middle East, isn't saying much. It's a relatively small country whose only real blemishes are the extensive use of slave labour and possibly only covert funding of international terrorist groups, as opposed to Saudi Arabia who have been doing it for so long they don't even hide it from the national budget anymore.

Therein, however, lies the probable cause. Saudi Arabia, the bloated kingpin of the Middle East, supports different extremists and fundamentalists from the ones Qatar does. It's also why they don't like Iran, for example. Qatar supported the Muslim Brotherhood during the Arab Spring and has long supported Hamas. Saudi Arabia has normally just preferred rabid suicide bombers and has long given up on the Palestinian cause. At this point, it must be reiterated that neither side can be classified as "not insane and evil" but in diplomatic crises we speak in relatives, not absolutes. So, when the Gulf countries cite Qatar as supporting

terrorists, it's just not the terrorists the others are funding and arming and teaching to blow themselves up in the name of God.

Another major point of irritation for the more rabid and "backwards" Middle Eastern countries (still looking at you, Saudi Arabia) has been the *Al Jazeera* news network based in Doha. *Al Jazeera* has long been seen as a real progressive success of the Middle East—an internationally renowned media station offering outspoken and quality reporting beyond the state-sponsored propaganda machines and neutered-by-censorship drive we usually see day to day. This obviously does not sit well with a country that has barely changed in the last 500 years, where women can get stoned to death if there's nothing to watch on Sundays since *Game of Thrones* ended. Imagine the uproar in the House of Saud when they see women reporting for *Al Jazeera*, that too without headscarves. It's an offense to the most basic fabrics of Saudi society. And also, whatever terrible tragedy is being reported on is probably their fault.

Lastly, Qatar has been seen as getting too friendly with Iran, the leper of the region. Obviously, there are insurmountable differences that prohibit Sunnis and Shias to be friends, or even passing acquaintances, like you and that guy whose name you don't remember

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(and probably never knew) but say hi to if he sees you on the street before you can avoid eye contact. In fact, these differences are so grievous across various countries at this exact moment that their people are slaughtering each other mercilessly.

Qatar has been handed a list of demands by the other Gulf countries, including the shutting down of *Al Jazeera*, an immediate end to the

supporting of their terrorists, and an annual tournament where children hunt each other with bows and arrows and swords and spears and stuff in a sacrificial spectacle for the enjoyment of the Mad King Salman in Riyadh. He will probably watch through that mysterious orb that he made Trump touch a few months ago. Qatar has responded by flexing its financial muscle by buying Neymar of Brazil and sending him to Paris, because no amount of money could convince him to show up at Qatar. The blockade has eased since June, many on-looking countries who were looking in like your neighbour when you're changing and had sided with the Saudis have gone back to restarting diplomatic relations. Iran has offered support but that has not helped since Qatar's airspace becoming very limited. The Kuwaiti Emir, objectively the most useless of all Emirs, is mediating this conflict. When it will end, who knows. But don't feel too sorry about a bunch of Arabs having a money fight because no matter what happens they will have so much more money and oil than you and even laughing at their misfortune is depressing.

Next week: 5 things everyone else became ok with 800 years ago that women in Saudi Arabia can still be stoned to death for—number 4 will shock you.

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ENTERTAINMENT

When it was announced that *Feluda* was getting a 'Bangladeshi' reboot, I was excited. As someone fortunate enough to have grown up in an era before smartphones and the internet, books were a big part of my childhood, and *Feluda* was one of my first idols. The *Feluda* TV series directed by Sandip Roy is also one of my fondest memories of watching television as a child, following



the adventures of the inimitable trio of Sabyasachi Chakrabarty, Saswata Chatterjee and Rabi Ghosh solve crimes. Truth be told, I became fairly detached from *Feluda* in the years after; I did not have a chance to follow the films, so this seemed like a great opportunity to reconnect with a long-lost hero. To know that Kandy Productions and Tom Creations were the producers was also assuring; they had brought us some good content in recent years—*Aynabaji Original Series* and *Osthir Somoye Sivosti'r Golpo*.

After watching about 96 minutes of the first story—*Sheyal Debota Rohoshho*—on streaming platform Bioscopelive, I felt equal parts happy and irked.

First up, the good stuff: This is a *Feluda* of our times. He has a Facebook page, hauls Uber for his commutes instead of the ambassador taxis, and the iPhone has replaced his film camera and notebook. With the Joker t-shirts and iPad vlogs, Topshe (played by Riddhi Sen) is also the quintessential post-millennial. Parambrata Chatterjee, who directs and stars as the sleuth extraordinaire, has gotten the tonality of a 21st-century *Feluda* and Topshe right. He has done justice to the 'reboot'—taking a 1970 story from *Sandesh* magazine and blowing it up to fit the web and app-streaming times. Still keeping plenty of nods to the original story must have been a daunting task and screenwriters Aniruddha and Padmanava Dasgupta have done commendably on that aspect. The music, too, is great—interpreting the original tune into something very contemporary and yet really nostalgic. The throwbacks

to Charminar cigarettes and seeking some Sidhu Jyatha wisdom are also nice touches. The 'Dhaka romanticism', including *Feluda's* family ties here, feels a little like pandering to the Bangladeshi audience, but is also done mostly well.

Acting-wise, Parambrata sheds his Topshe shadow (which he played in three *Feluda* films from the 2000s) and embodies a young, agile and suave Prodosh Mitra (*Feluda's* real name).

A FELUDA OF OUR TIMES?

FAHMIM FERDOUS

Tariq Anam Khan is expectedly brilliant in his complex character. But more on the acting later.

Now, getting to the not-so-good part, and this list is longer than I ever wished it to be. The production seems rushed and really callous, and prevented me from ever getting lost in the story. The dubbing was really hurried: lip-sync was off at way too many places, and continuity errors (like Tarek's having gloves on one hand in one shot and not having them on in the next early in episode 1, and *Feluda* shooting with his left hand from the bike near the end of episode 4 although he is clearly right-handed) can be overlooked in debut or amateur works, but in a high-profile production like this, feel sore to the eye. Whoever was in charge of graphics did not proof-read the *Sherlock*-style floating texts and graphics, leaving spelling errors (misspelling the medicine 'Metformin' for 'Metmorfin' in episode 1 and misspelling 'Kolkataye' in Bangla in episode 3). There was also a terribly-done mock-up of a Facebook profile with horribly-Photoshopped photos (episode 3).

Dialogue writing is one of THE biggest issues with the series, to the point of ruining it, at least for the Bangladeshi audience. The weird accent that most Dhaka-based characters talk in is almost an intentional mockery: people of Dhaka (or anywhere in Bangladesh) do not speak in such colloquialisms. The worst of the lot is Shahed Ali's Inspector Parvez; I don't know if he was meant to be a foil character or comic relief, but every time he spoke it infuriated me. Dolly Zahur's character also weirdly switches her accent mid-dialogue in a couple of places—to that nauseating accent that people from West Bengal think we speak in.

The character of Nilmoni Sanyal also speaks an unfathomable concoction of an accent. At one point in episode 2, Topshe is offered *samocho* and is bewildered,

only for *Feluda* to explain that "Over here, they call *shingaras samocho*." Just...no. Firstly, we have both *shingaras* and *shamucha* here and they are different. Secondly, *samocho* is too common a Hindi word for Topshe to be culturally shocked by.

Nobody in Dhaka refers to any Mr Mitra (*Feluda*) as 'Mr Mittir' as Nilmoni says. That is a distinctively Kolkata style of saying things, and often used in

In terms of direction, it feels like a gallant effort that falls ever so short; the action scenes (especially the opening chase sequence and *Feluda's* sole close combat one) don't invoke the thrill they should. Depicting *Feluda* on-screen is no small task, and it feels like playing the lead AND directing does get a little much for Parambrata, from all these issues. One expositional scene where *Feluda* walks Topshe back through the



Satyajit's scripts. *Feluda's* Dhaka driver saying 'Agge' and 'Ji Mama' in the space of three seconds in the same conversation (episode 4) sums up of how terribly the Dhaka and Kolkata dialogues are mixed up by the writers. Countless such oversights take away greatly from the entire experience. Such a shame.

The script, while brave and largely good, is not watertight. A number of plot devices are done poorly. What's Nilmoni's motivation to give *Feluda* the hieroglyph? Why do the goons just mildly rough-up *Feluda* and Topshe and leave without any threat? How does *Feluda* just acquire a gun in a different country, and fire it in the middle of a road with oncoming traffic in broad daylight without any commotion? How does driver Hasan convince a stranger in a matter of seconds to lend a motorbike and just continue on a hot pursuit? Finally, Topshe gathering police backup and finding *Feluda* and Nilmoni in the climax scene just at the right time is a lazy *Deus Ex Machina* that really pushes the audience's willing suspension of disbelief.

first triggering event, however, is a masterstroke, and was my highlight of the entire story.

Another of my gripes is that almost the entire production crew, judging by their names in the credits, appear to be from West Bengal. Maybe it was just that Parambrata was given full liberty on assembling the crew, but it just feels a little odd that an essentially 'Bangladeshi' production is almost entirely made by foreigners. In the press releases, we were promised that this was going to be a 'Bangladeshi' production, and I feel in that aspect, we got a little duped. From the promotional campaign for the series in India (where it is showing on Kolkata-based streaming platform Addatimes), it seems like they are branding it entirely differently there as a new *Feluda* web series, directed by and starring their own stars—and that feels a little two-faced. While that is a marketing decision and should not be my headache, I cannot help but be a teeny-weeny bit uncomfortable with it.

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