

**J**iboner Bone Bone (*In the Forests of Life*) is a heartfelt autobiography written by Nuruddin Ahmad (1920-2010), one of the first Bengali-Muslim officials of the Indian Forest Service (IFS). The tales of his eventful life take in the growth and coming to being of Bangladesh, his observations on Bengali middle-class society and how he worked his way to the top of the Forest Department in the midst of hostile British and Pakistani governments.

The book is divided into four chapters: British India, Pakistan, 1971 and Bangladesh. It starts with Ahmad's early life in Kushtia under the British Raj. Kushtia in those days was considered an epitome of flourishing Bengali culture and religious harmony, and the book paints a society where Hindus and Muslims shared their religious rites and festivities, largely untouched by the religious tension that was rapidly spreading elsewhere in the subcontinent .

There were two theatre halls where local performers and artists from Calcutta regularly performed. Bangladesh's national poet Kazi Nazrul Islam used to frequent the town and once stayed in the author's home for a month as a guest. "I can remember his face covered in curly hair. I always found him busy with a harmonium, or pen and paper. He used to sit to write with a plate full of betel leaves," writes Nuruddin.

When he gained admission to Ripon College and Presidency College in Calcutta, Nuruddin bade farewell to his peaceful life in Kushtia and embarked for the hustle and bustle of city life. His descriptions of Calcutta's populous streets, budding movie theatres and flourishing art and culture in Santiniketan highlights how taken he was by the charms of that city. In Santiniketan, Nuruddin made friends with famous singer Kanika Banerjee, Abdul Ahad and Shamsul Huda Chowdhury (later speaker of the Bangladesh Parliament). After completing his higher studies, Nuruddin was selected for the Indian Forest Service through a highly competitive IFS exam.

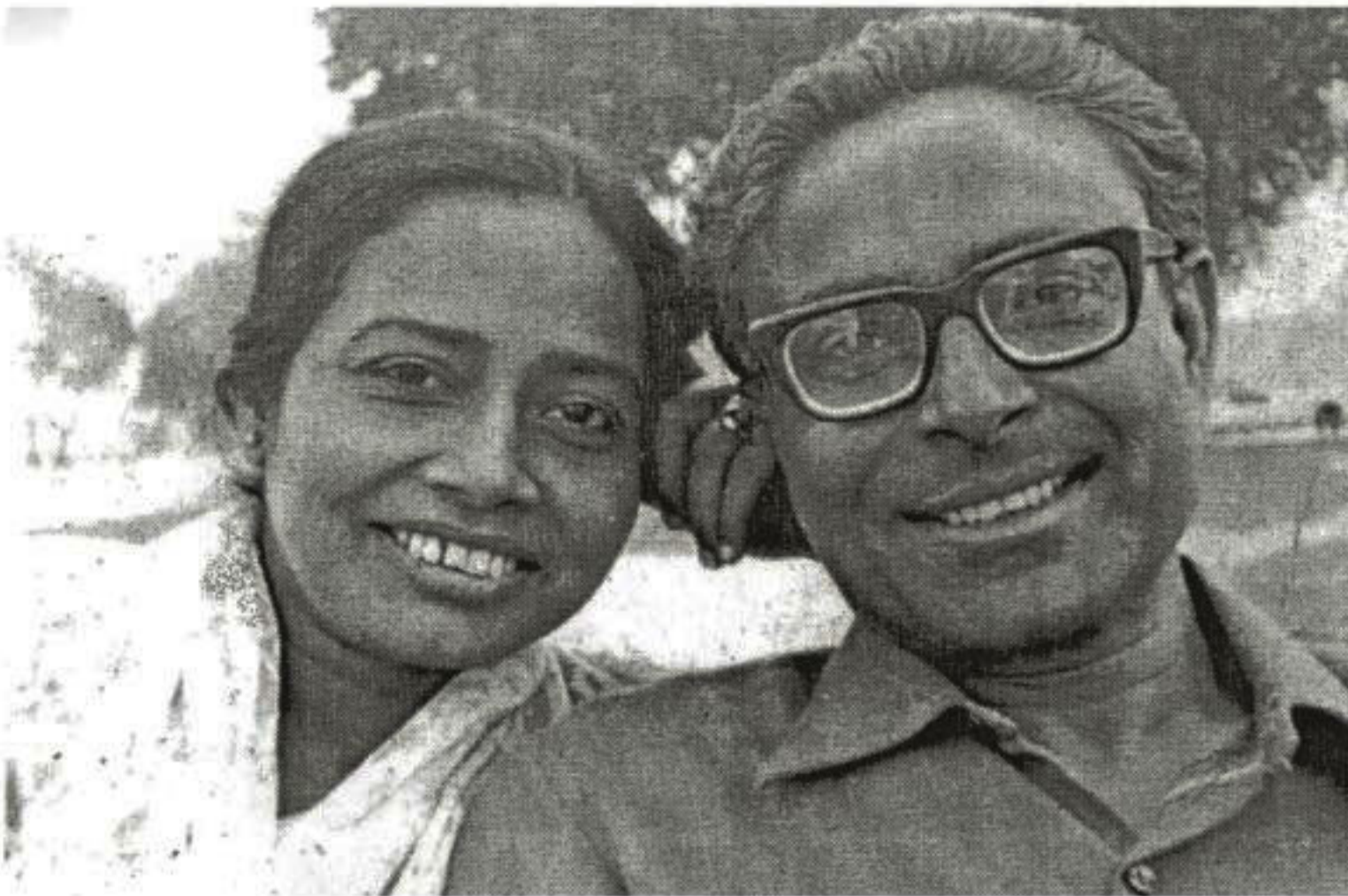
After a brief stint in the hilly forest of Kurseong, Nuruddin was stationed in CHT in 1946. His mission was to conduct the "First Exploratory Survey of Inaccessible Sangoo and Mathamuri Forests and War Damage Assessment of CHT".

In this part of his memoirs, he paints elaborate word pictures of what he saw and experienced in the cloud-covered mountains and rainforests of CHT. During his trip to Lama he witnessed huge herds of wild elephants, gaurs (Indian bison), barking deer and saw pugmarks of clouded leopards and, on one occasion, he came face to face with a Bengal Tiger, which has now disappeared from this forest.

The local Chakma people also helped Nuruddin most of the times voluntarily and sometimes, in exchange for small amounts of opium. At that time, the only way to travel in the CHT was by rowing canoes along the Sangu and Matamuhuri rivers.

"We faced great difficulty in controlling our canoes due to the frequent rapids all along the rivers," writes Nuruddin.

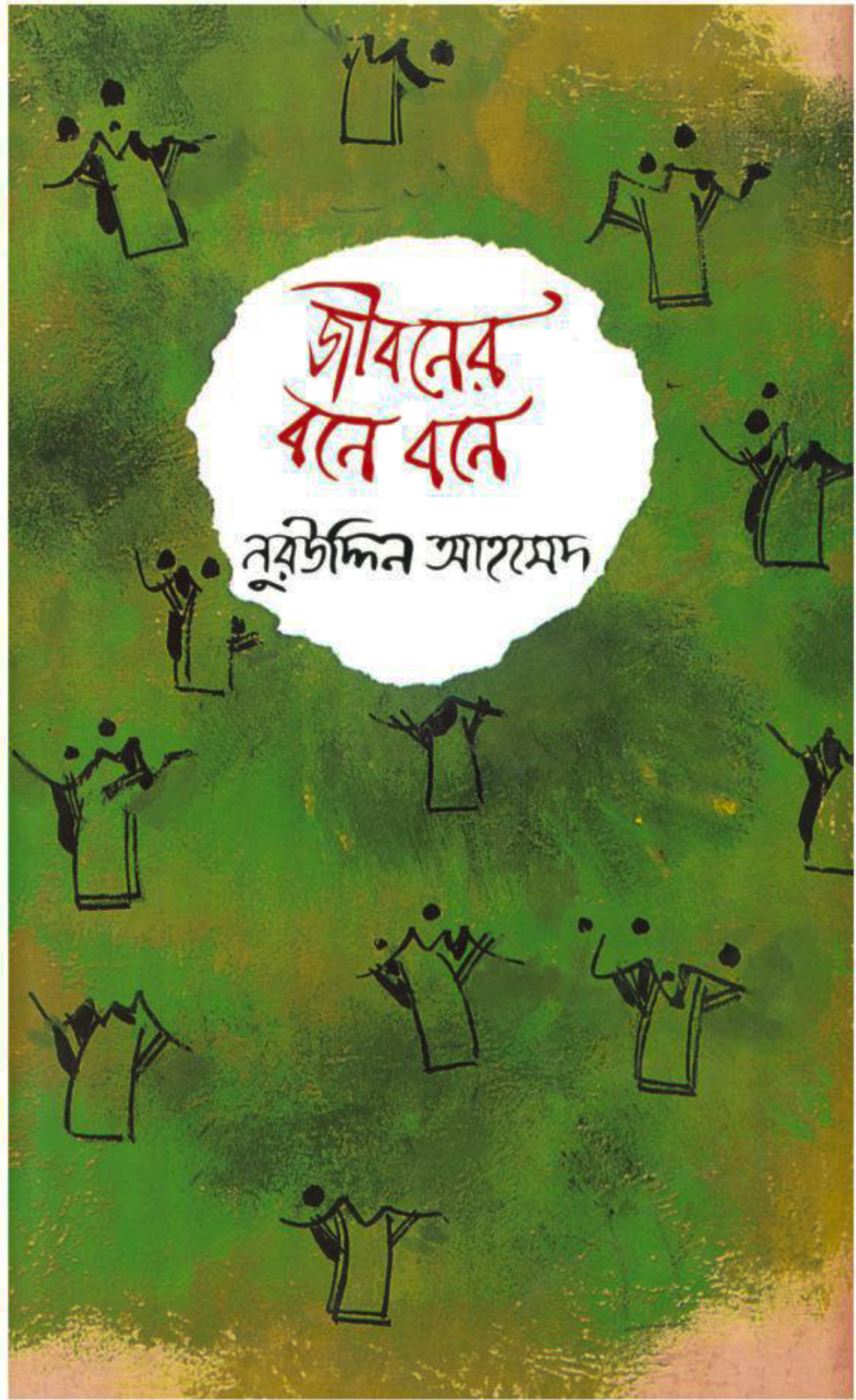
Nuruddin was briefly stationed in Calcutta after completing the survey but returned to CHT again when Pakistan was formed. He was in Rangmati when the Kaptai Dam was under construction



Author Nuruddin Ahmad and his wife Begum Budrunnesa Ahmad

## Jiboner Bone Bone A MEMOIR THAT DEPICTS BANGLADESH

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN



and one of the most moving passages in the book is Nuruddin's view of how the ancient Chakma town was engulfed by the artificial lake created by the dam.

The author also reveals how Pakistani and British ruling classes hunted many animals to extinction. When he was in CHT, the Deputy Commissioner of CHT Colonel Niblett ordered him to collect ivory to be offered as gifts to the visiting ambassador of the USA. Nuruddin refused and so faced harassment during his stay in the CHT. An example of how much his life is woven into the fabric of Bangladesh history is that his memoirs contain a tale of Pakistan President Field Marshal Ayub Khan's visit to the Sundarbans when Nuruddin was stationed there. Ayub Khan wanted to hunt crocodiles, but when East Pakistan Governor Momen Khan presented him with a dozen hatchlings, Ayub Khan ordered them to be released in the river. Nuruddin also mentioned that the President and all the officials devoured several chitral deer at lunch and dinner.

Throughout the book, Nuruddin is vocal against corruption in the forest department. He blames corruption of the forest officials and the negative intervention of political leaders for the rapid disappearance of Bangladesh's forests and wildlife. He writes: "Corruption in the Sundarbans was a legendary thing. Officials used to offer huge amounts of money to the ministers to be transferred to the Sundarbans. The corrupt officials maintained a good liaison with the pirates who destroyed the forest mercilessly. After the liberation of Bangladesh, I received requests from the ministers even for the transfer of a forest guard to the Sundarbans."

As a close confidant of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Nuruddin Ahmad managed to get several afforestation and coastal afforestation projects passed by the leader. However, after Bangabandhu's assassination, Nuruddin was jailed and sent into retirement after his release.

Nuruddin and his family played an important role in organising Bangladesh's movement for liberation. As the closest neighbour of Bangabandhu, his family provided immense support to the family members of Bangabandhu during the tumultuous years of the late 60s and early 70s. Nuruddin's wife Begum Budrunnesa Ahmad was the founder of Bangladesh Mahila Awami League and a staunch organiser during the Liberation War. After fleeing to India, she served in the refugee camps to organise and distribute relief for the refugees. Nuruddin's eldest daughter Professor Dr Nasreen Ahmad, current pro-vice chancellor (academic) of the University of Dhaka served in the Shwadhin Bangla Betar Kendra as a singer and news presenter during the war.

For his front seat view of Bangladeshi history and his part in the valuable, although now diminishing, natural resource of the country, this book holds substantial value for those who are interested in the country's past. The many rare photographs in each chapter only add to its worth.

*Jiboner Bone Bone* can be purchased at *Agamee Prakashani* in Bangladesh and at Camp 2 B in Kolkata for Tk 300.

The writer can be contacted at [shahnawaz.khan@thedailystar.net](mailto:shahnawaz.khan@thedailystar.net)

### BOOK REVIEW

### ENTERTAINMENT

"Danger, Will Robinson." This phrase will soon be on T-shirts, mugs and fan art. Because *Lost in Space* reboot is a killer show. It features the Robinsons, a family of five who have left earth as it will soon become unliveable and is devoid of proper sunlight. It's what we humans do. We give in to our greed and keep hacking away at resources until nothing remains. The Robinsons travel with many other families in search of another planet to live on peacefully—and maybe eventually destroy that too.

The original black and white show aired back in 1965. I vaguely remember watching a few reruns as a kid, eventually giving up because it was too sugar and spice nice like any usual 60's shows used to be. A 1998 movie starring Matt LeBlanc and some cheesy outer space graphics was a fun affair. 2004 saw a reboot directed by the legendary, pigeon flying in slow motion,

## LOST IN SPACE

EHSANUR RAZA RONNY

action scene specialist John Woo. It was a decent pilot with very good characters but no one picked it up. Possibly, because—it was not gritty enough. This year, it was Netflix's turn with their massively bulging wallets, to try a reboot.

It stars Toby Stephens as the full-time Marine and part-time estranged dad John Robinson. Molly Parker plays the super intelligent, slightly angry mom—Maureen Robinson. The kids get thrown in the mix as Taylor Russell plays the confident Judy trained as the medic. Mina Sundwall playing Penny is the quick witted, comic relief middle child followed by the youngest, Will Robinson, played by Maxwell Jenkins.

The first season with 10 episodes begins with their vessel crashing on a new planet and things going horribly wrong. It plays out like a very interesting, non-cheesy soap opera where things start to get better only to go very wrong.

### ADVERTORIAL

Ayesha Karim (not real name) was working in a reputed bank in Dhaka—a job coveted by many. Two years ago, she gave birth to her first child. Since then, she had to juggle two different worlds between rearing her child and managing her job. Her husband, also a high official at a company, had little time to look after the child as well. Ayesha resorted to domestic help. As days went by, she became quite anxious about her child during her working hours. At a point, she decided to leave the job—a choice she had never thought she would have to make during her bright academic life.

Being a mother is the most wonderful moment in a woman's life, but sometimes it requires a lot of sacrifice on the part of the woman. The story of Ayesha is not a unique one in the country. There are many women who have had to entirely sacrifice their jobs to raise a child or play other familial roles, with little opportunity of ever re-entering the corporate world after such a lengthy time away from it.

For women with stories like Ayesha in the country,



The show has been rebooted three times now.



Why would you want to watch it? The characters are well played and develop very well even though for a family of super smart people, they make some really dumb choices. It has a villain who is annoyingly manipulative played brilliantly by Parker Posey as the fake Dr Smith. Brilliant because you can't help not hating her.

And it has the most traditional heart string-pulling TV trope of all: a young kid and his budding relationship with a sidekick. Usually the sidekick is a dog that may or may not die. We hate it when a dog dies and ends up making such a show famous. Remember John Wick? Here, the friend is a killer alien robot.

Why you wouldn't watch it? The characters are dysfunctional and that may not be your thing if all you want is a rosy version of life. Things constantly go wrong much like in an Indiana Jones movie. And the villain is super annoying, so much so you wonder why people do not just tie her up and leave her in a cave full of killer flying birds. She is so inherently untrustworthy.

Verdict: It's a sci-fi action series with a stellar cast that could still do with some more work. And yet, it works. The entire premise of the suspense is not about who will die but all about how they will survive. And that will get you binge watching the last few episodes.

Ehsanur Raza Ronny is a confused dad, all-round car guy, model car builder, and cartoonist. He is also Editor of Shift (automobiles), Bytes (technology), and Next Step (career) of The Daily Star.

## No Women, No Quit!

Stride, a unique initiative by Unilever Bangladesh, started advancing the idea that there is a pathway back into the corporate world after a career break.

"When I went on a career break, it was because of pressing familial conditions. When I was ready to get

myself back in the game I found it was easier said than done. The break coupled with the fact that I now had a young child made me lose edge over other candidates who did not have the same obligations. I have a kid, which means as a mother I am required to do everything in my life with greater efficiency, but I was struggling with the professional assumption that I'm now less efficient after having a child. Stride gave me that chance to pursue my career again, to do what I love and do right by the people I love!" says Mahjabeen Tuba, who currently works on HR projects under the Stride programme.

The initiative is designed to ease the transition for women returning to the workforce after having spent some time away from it. The programme allows for gaining hands-on experience in running business projects as well as mentoring from some of the best minds in the corporate world. The flexible working hours and terms as well as the company's agile working policies allow women to design their work in a way that is suitable to their unique needs.

For more details on Stride, visit the Unilever Bangladesh website at <https://www.unilever.com.bd/careers/professionals/stride/>