

BARBIE

A fearless plunge into the neon-pink abyss



The iconic Mattel doll has served as the vehicle for our hopes, desires, fantasy as well as animosity for 6 decades now. The movie captures the spirit of Barbie's timeless appeal which is beloved by generations of children who spent hours playing with Barbie and her friends Ken, Midge, Skipper, and Allan.

SHANIZ CHOWDHURY

Barbie can be seen in almost every guise, including Stereotypical Barbie (played by Margot Robbie with great panache), President Barbie (underutilised and consistently entertaining Issa Rae), Doctor Barbie (Hari Nef), Lawyer Barbie (Sharon Rooney), Disheveled Barbie (Kate McKinnon), etc. Overall, the Barbies are diverse in terms of ethnicity and body image, including a wheelchair-using Barbie. They all live together in Barbie Land, which is exquisitely portrayed, with gorgeous vistas, vibrant backdrops, and well-crafted characters.

Greta Gerwig, who co-wrote the script with Noah Baumbach, draws inspiration from *The Truman Show* and *Toy Story* as they plunge the protagonist into an existential crisis brought on by a glimpse into the real world that is encroaching on Barbie's synthetic, comforting idyll.

This seemingly casual excursion is meant to give the movie depth and substance. Barbie becomes plagued with regret and

mortality-related ideas as she realises that the outside world is a far cry from her delirious fantasy land. She and the other Barbies grapple with the idea of whether Barbie dolls are demeaning or empowering.

On the other hand, Ken is busy filling his empty head with all the patriarchal lies as Barbie goes through a rude awakening. Ken learns that women are inherently held subordinate to men in the Real World, an idea he brings back to Barbie Land where it has the glaringly ludicrous effect of brainwashing all the women into acting like submissive housewives.

Barbie acts as a dazzling mirror, examining social norms, deconstructing stereotypes,



and boldly tackling underlying themes of the human race such as gender inequality and toxic masculinity issues.

Gerwig's strategy is skewed more toward audiences who want to indulge in nostalgia as there are subtle references and inside jokes throughout the movie. Even though Gerwig occasionally uses the film as the vehicle for what seems like a gender studies lecture for undergraduates, it is evident that the movie was created by professionals who understand how children's imaginations develop while playing with Barbies. The majority of its messages are encouraging for young girls, while those that gave the film its PG-13 rating might overlook it due to

the visually pleasing scenes and costumes.

I was amazed by the technical depth of the Barbie world and the mixed styles of filming used to juxtapose reality from fantasy. The musical numbers in the movie left a lasting impression, as the catchy tunes and fantastic choreography enhanced the story and added an extra level of enjoyment.

Robbie is an excellent actor who excels at balancing perfection and chaos. Ryan Gosling as Ken is a match made in heaven as he sports a range of expressions, as the helpless pretty boy. He is the true comedic gem and exemplifies how the pervasive nature of patriarchy can sink its teeth into even the most naïve men. However, this begs the question why let Ken steal the spotlight if "Barbie" is all about highlighting and honouring women?

At times, the monologues, humour and bitter ironies presented a commercialised and co-opted version of feminism, which is as good as it gets when the movie is produced by Barbie's corporate manufacturer Mattel. The script feels most daring when the

movie calls out Mattel for the high and unreachable ideals it placed on women through fuchsia hegemony.

The script could have done away with some unnecessary scenes and put in more nuance and subtlety. It could maybe have more Barbie and Ken in the real world. They should have empowered women without victimising them, and especially not have the women fight back using petty ways.

However, the script is self-aware. It is hysterical but there are also times when it feels a little demure and restrained, as if they want to be funny but can only be harsh and caustic. Regardless, the writers had enough faith in the script to leave it open for a sequel. The ending steered clear of clichés like romance or the "hero saves all" theme.

The movie does not just boast zany and charm, it is proof of what is possible even in the darkest recesses of capitalism. "Barbie" is an innovative and subversive film which is gearing up to be one of the biggest summer blockbusters in recent memory.

NEWS

Now S&P goes negative

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"Lower generation of current account receipts than we expect, a higher overall current account deficit than we forecast, or a failure to materially boost foreign exchange reserves would indicate downward pressure on the rating."

The American credit rating agency could also downgrade Bangladesh if it observes a material and sustained rise in commercial banks' ownership of government debt as a proportion of the sector's total assets.

This would signify a limited ability for banks to lend more to the government without crowding out private sector borrowing.

"Our ratings on Bangladesh reflect the country's modest per capita income and limited fiscal flexibility owing to a combination of low revenue-generation capacity and high interest burden."

Bangladesh's per capita income, which S&P estimates to be less than \$2,700 for fiscal 2023-24, remains one of its main rating constraints.

"This level of per capita income limits the fiscal and monetary flexibility needed to respond to exogenous shocks."

Evolving administrative and institutional settings represent additional rating constraints, S&P said.

"We weigh these factors against consistently high economic growth and an external position that's supported by substantive engagement with bilateral and multilateral development partners, large remittances from overseas Bangladeshi workers, and a globally competitive garment sector."

Despite this structural support, Bangladesh has witnessed a material decline in the strength of its external balance sheet and liquidity position, it said.

The economy is likely to expand at 6.64 percent over the next three years, reflecting a slight moderation compared with the growth trend of its long-term average real GDP.

Another drawback for Bangladesh is its political landscape, which remains polarised with considerable power centred on the ruling Awami League.

"The opposition's representation in parliament remains extremely small, limiting checks and balances on the government."

The highly concentrated domestic political conditions may constrain the effectiveness of institutions and undermine the predictability of future policy responses, it said.

S&P may reinstate a 'stable' outlook to stable if Bangladesh materially improves its external position.

This would be indicated by a substantial increase in foreign exchange reserves combined with a modest current account deficit, and healthy growth in current account receipts.

More favourable trade and financial flows will be necessary for Bangladesh's external settings to stabilise over the next 12 months, S&P added.

"We are already in a difficult situation, so there would not be any big impact of this downgrade by S&P," said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh.

The IMF programme has not brought any improvement in the foreign exchange situation.

"There is no chance of the situation improving in the next six months — there are lots of payment obligations pending. The forex situation is not heading in the right direction as of now," said Mansur, a former economist of the IMF.

For the situation to materially improve, the government needs a steady resolve.

The interest rate needs to go up further, the tax collections need to be ramped up and the government's expenditure needs to be cut substantially.

"It is tough to change these things. Nothing really is in favour of the government or the economy. It remains unclear whether the government has the time or the guts to do the policy changes needed," Mansur added.

The government though played down the significance of the outlook downgrade by S&P.

"This will have no impact on the Bangladesh economy," said BB Spokesman Md Mezbahul Haque.

Bangladesh's macroeconomic fundamentals are "very strong".

"Our expected growth rate is close to projection. As you saw, ADB [Asian Development Bank] recently revised its estimates upwards."

On July 23, ADB revised its fiscal 2022-23's growth estimate to 6 percent, which is higher than its April forecast of 5.3 percent. ADB's estimate is in line with the provisional growth estimate of 6.03 percent made by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics in May.

S&P's negative outlook on the Bangladesh economy would have had an impact had the government issued a sovereign bond.

"In the current global economic scenario, all countries are going through a stressed situation. Based on that, all ratings are seeing a change. Internally, there is no problem in the economy."

Prof Yunus pays Tk 12.47cr in tax

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three charitable trusts.

Meanwhile, the SC ordered status quo until August 3 on the proceedings of a case filed against Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus and three other officials of Grameen Telecom in connection with labour law violation.

Justice M Enayetur Rahim, chamber judge of the Appellate Division of the SC, passed the order following a petition filed by the state seeking a stay on a High Court rule that questioned the labour court order framing charges against Prof Yunus and three others in the case.

The apex court's chamber judge also sent the state's petition to its full bench for hearing on August 3.

Prof Yunus's lawyer Abdullah Al-Mamun told The Daily Star that the SC chamber judge issued the order of status quo on "the subject matter"

of the case, which means that all its proceedings will remain halted until further order from the apex court.

The labour court cannot continue with the trial following the SC chamber judge's order, he said.

Lawyer Mamun said the chamber judge was not scheduled to sit at his court yesterday.

However, Justice M Enayetur Rahim dealt with the case as a special chamber judge since Chief Justice Hasan Foez Siddique has assigned him to do so following an application from the state, he said.

The lawyer also said the state has filed a petition with Appellate Division against an HC rule, which is unprecedented.

Additional Attorney General Sk Md Morshed, who represented the state during the hearing, could not be reached for comments despite repeated attempts.

Free up more beds for dengue patients

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After the meeting, Col Johirul told The Daily Star, "We will be able to serve 370-380 patients with the existing manpower. We are under pressure as more patients are coming every day."

"We have already sent a demand letter to the ministry for more manpower. But all the hospitals in Dhaka are under pressure. So, it will not be easy to get required manpower. It will take time."

Health officials, meanwhile, said they have already started distribution of manpower to tackle the situation.

"We have asked the nursing institutes to send nurses. Doctors who are working at hospitals where dengue patients are not so many will be sent to those under pressure," Prof

Ahmedul Kabir, additional director general of the health directorate, told this newspaper yesterday.

At the meeting, directors of different hospitals in Dhaka said many patients are unnecessarily coming to the capital from outside.

The health minister said the hospitals in divisional cities and other major towns should take measures so that all patients don't need to travel to the capital.

Urging people not to get panicky, Prof Kabir said dengue treatment is possible even at an upazila health complex. "So, people should not waste time and money travelling to Dhaka and other major cities."

Zahid also asked the health officials to work closely to destroy the larvae

of Aedes mosquitoes, the carrier of dengue virus.

Meanwhile, lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan who represents the complainant of the case against Prof Yunus and others, told this correspondent that his client will not move before the labour court concerned until the SC issues further orders.

Following a petition filed by Prof Yunus, the HC on July 23 issued a rule asking the state to explain in two weeks why the labour court order that framed charges against him and three others of Grameen Telecom in the case should not be scrapped.

Sheikh Merina Sultana, chairman of the Third Labour Court of Dhaka, on June 6 framed charges against Prof Yunus and others.

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Chinese foreign minister replaced

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He has filled in for Qin during his absence and represented China at a national security advisers' meeting of BRICS countries in Johannesburg, South Africa this week.

State media did not report why Qin was removed from office and China's foreign ministry did not respond to a request for comment. Xi signed a presidential order to make the decision effective, state news agency Xinhua reported.

"The lack of an explanation opens more questions than provides answers," said Ja Ian Chong, associate professor of political science at National University of Singapore.

"It also underscores the opacity and unpredictability, even arbitrariness in the current political system."

It is not the first time there has been an unexplained absence of officials in China.

Industry minister Xiao Yaqing disappeared from public view for nearly a month last year before it was revealed he was being investigated for corruption.

Qin was one of China's youngest foreign ministers, enjoying a meteoric ascent that analysts partly attributed to his closeness to Xi. He was twice foreign ministry spokesman, between 2006-2014, and chief protocol officer

from 2014-2018, overseeing many of Xi's contacts with foreign leaders.

He headed to Washington as ambassador in July 2021, after a period of unusual public vitriol between US and Chinese officials.

Wang was promoted to the politburo of the Chinese Communist Party, one of China's top leadership bodies.

Heretakes the foreign ministry post as China seeks to re-engage with the world after years of Covid-induced isolation, as a mooted economic recovery fails to gain hold and the country spars with the United States over issues from Ukraine, Russia and Taiwan to trade and technology disputes.

Firefighting plane pilots die in Greece crash as wildfires rage

AFP, Rhodes

Two pilots died when their water-bombing plane crashed while battling a blaze on the Greek island of Evia yesterday, as wildfires flared across the Mediterranean.

Greece's fire department said the Canadair aircraft crashed into a ravine close to where the fire started on Sunday. Footage on state TV ERT showed the plane clipping a tree before falling nose-first and exploding.

EC won't hold

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election commissioner. In response to another question, he said that there has been no official discussion over election schedule at the EC so far.

The schedule must be announced 45 days ahead of the polls, which should be in late December or early January.

In response to a question on whether the EC was under pressure to hold polls under a partisan government, he said they faced no government obstacles in any work so far. "We hope we can continue to work like this in the future."

Stop anti-state

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involved in arson attacks, terrorism, militancy," she added.

Regarding the sanctions against Rab, the PM said, "Unfortunately, sanctions are imposed on those who worked in curbing terrorism and militancy. Due to this, they lose their confidence."

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen and PM's Private Industry and Investment Adviser Salman F Rahman were present at the conference.

In another development, Hasina offered Nepal the use of its newly constructed Payra Port during a meeting with her Nepalese counterpart Pushpa Kamal Dahal.

The two premiers met at the newly opened Bangladesh-Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Room in the FAO Headquarters in Rome.

The leaders are there to attend the UN Food Systems Summit.

"Bangladesh has already opened the Chalna and Chittagong ports for Nepal. Nepal can use the newly constructed Payra Port as well," Foreign Minister Momen quoted Hasina as saying.