

REVIEW

Baba, Someone's FOLLOWING ME

A thriller that subverts expectations



When all the characters are added to the stew, the conclusion becomes the gravy that few can see coming until the final seasoning is dropped.

SADI MOHAMMAD SHAHNEWAZ

It is usually a good sign when a director acknowledges the intelligence of his target audience, respects it when putting the finishing touches on a story. While entering Mohakhali Cineplex to watch the premiere of Shihab Shaheen's *Baba, Someone's Following Me*, the pessimist in me instantly assumed that it'd be a straightforward tale of racism faced by South Asian students in Australia. In reality, the Binge original takes a more nuanced task to convey much more than that.

Shihab Shaheen, who wanted to tell of a harrowing incident that befell his daughter, does not fall into the pitfall of documentarising the actual event. Instead, bucking the 'instant gratification' trends of recent OTT

daughter (Tasnia Farin) and her father (Shahiduzzaman Selim). A shadowy figure follows her, as she calls her father to tell him that someone is following her. In light of the recent news of racist attacks in Australia, where she resides to study, the father panics. All the exposition in the film is accounted for in seconds.

What unfolds afterward is far-removed from the usual expectation – rather, the slow nature of *Baba, Someone's Following Me* might turn away impatient viewers expecting an action-packed romp. However, if one is to follow with patience, it rewards through its narrative and a conclusion that leaves no loose ends.

Carrying the story on his back is Shahiduzzaman Selim, who makes you want to ignore some of the plot holes

However, the helplessness that he is successfully able to portray on-screen not only excuses his behaviour, but to some extent, helps justify it. Every frame that the veteran actor is in, he makes it his own.

Tasnia Farin is tasked with the difficult job of portraying Bijoya, who has to walk a fine line between being helpless and empowered. As she is followed and (spoilers) abducted by a seemingly racist Aussie man, her emotions range from cautious, terrified and mortified, to vengeful.

It is only the time that we are introduced to Shohel Mondol and Irfan Sazzad in the web film that Shihab Shaheen starts to unfold his actual narrative. A keen-eyed viewer can already start to unfold the knots in the story when flashbacks of Farin

'detective' moniker, leaves something to be desired in his performance, as the audience is used to seeing in his other memorable roles. Admittedly stoic by nature in this character, he does get the job done.

When all the above characters are added to the stew, the conclusion becomes the gravy that few can see coming until the final hints are dropped. The director does a fantastic job of weaving together the narrative in a way that makes every character matter near the end.

Amidst the generally well-paced story, a few things do take away from the web film. Truth be told, it was clear that the crew, for whatever reason, had to settle for a substandard effort when it came to the secondary antagonist, the Australian gentleman who plays John. His delivery was laughable at times, and if not for Tasnia Farin putting in her heart during the scenes, would have ruined the gravitas. As mentioned,

there were many questions in the plot, including why the protagonist did not call the police helpline (maybe the real-life incident went down like that), and a shoehorned attempt to also include some political narrative which I found unnecessary.

I'd be remiss if I called *Baba, Someone's Following Me* a story about raising awareness about racism – in fact, the actual plot deviates far from it, while reminding the audience that it exists in even the most developed societies. However, when a project asks of you to subscribe to an OTT platform with your hard-earned money to watch, it is bound to have much more than a message. This is where Shihab Shaheen, Shahiduzzaman Selim, Tasnia Farin, Irfan Sazzad and Shohel Mondol pull you in – making a fictional world believable.

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thrillers, he opts for a slow-burn, beginning with a seemingly routine phone call from a daughter her father.

Within moments, we get to know of the strained relationship between the

and suspend your own disbelief – and the latter you'll need to do in quite some instances – for example when he marches into a minister's home in hopes of getting help for his daughter.

and her ex-lover, portrayed by Irfan, are shown to the audience. Irfan Sazzad's character has Down Syndrome, which the actor portrays wonderfully.

Shohel Mondol, while creditable in his

COUNTRYWIDE

Highway turns dumpsite

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Nilphamari

Authorities of Nilphamari's Saidpur municipality have continued dumping huge quantities of waste materials at an open space along the Dhaka-Nilphamari Highway, much to the nuisance of many local residents and travellers.

The callous act, which has been continuing for long, is not only affecting the local environment badly, but posing serious pollution threat as well, residents said.

During a visit to the area this correspondent found many piles of garbage at different spots along an eight-kilometre portion of the highway, stretching from Saidpur Bubus Terminal to Rabeya Flour Mills area under the municipality.

Though Roads and Highways Department (RHD) hung a warning signboard close to the waste disposal area that inscribes dumping of garbage beside highways is a punishable offence as per the Highway Act 2021, it seems offenders care about it very little.

Bus driver Abdul Hafiz said it is quite difficult for them to pay attention while crossing the dumping area amid bad odour.

Local resident Morshed Ali alleged that a section of garbage-carrying truck drivers of the municipality collects the household waste from different parts of the town and dump those beside the highway as some land owners pay them extra money in order to fill their low-lying land.

While talking, owner of SK Traders Fatima Rashed, who received the Joyita Award in 2022, said it is very difficult to stay inside her shop as bad smell emitting from the waste covers the whole area all the time.

Locals said finding no other alternative, they submitted a complaint to RHD, who completed their duty by hanging a signboard near the dumpsite.

Nilphamari RHD Executive Engineer Zahirul Islam said as they do not have any executive power, they only can conduct awareness campaigns.

Saidpur Municipality Mayor Rafika Akhtar Jahan said they have sent proposals to some representatives of international donors to build a permanent dumping station soon.



PHOTO: STAR

Dumping of waste has turned Motir Bazar area under Saidpur Municipality in Nilphamari into a landfill.

Some foreign

FROM PAGE 12

foreign countries that the upcoming election in Bangladesh should be free, fair, and credible. And no manipulation should take place," Habibul Awal said.

He said the country is in "crisis" over the election. "People are doubtful about the election. We need to come out of it. Everybody should discharge their duties responsibly."

Democracy is the most popular and proper form of government in the world. "If you want to keep democracy alive, elections must be kept alive," the CEC said.

"The debate over elections in the country is undesirable. Our political leadership has split on the fairness of this election. It wasn't desirable."

The people say this election will be acceptable if it is free, fair, and credible, Habibul Awal added.

He said they were "hurt" as ballot stuffing took place in some cases during the recently held by-elections to Lakshmipur-3 and Brahmanbaria-2 constituencies.

"We couldn't stop it. It's a shame," he said, adding that ballot stuffing has become a bad example during elections. The use of muscle power, black money, and manipulation has also been a bad trend.

The commission has promised to do its best to make the election free, fair, and credible. It has to rely on the administration, the judiciary, and the police.

"Without their help, the commission cannot hold elections alone. We need everyone's sincere and honest support. We hope that everyone will perform their duties honestly with their eyes open," the CEC added.

Cabinet okays it giving free rein

FROM PAGE 12

without procedural safeguards risks violating the rights of the data subject."

"According to section 10(2) (d) of the Act, any data may be collected from a data subject if it is deemed necessary for national security or prevention or detection of an offence. It neither specifies well-defined conditions nor any third party or judicial oversight in the event data needs to be collected for an investigation," said the letter addressed to Law Minister Anisul Huq and ICT Minister Zunaid Ahmed Palak.

They recommended the necessity for the collection and access to data must be clearly defined and the collection has to be proportionate with legitimate purposes and under independent judicial oversight.

"Any request to collect data should be accompanied by procedural safeguards and limitations on what specific data can be collected, for how long, its use and disclosure to other parties, its retention and deletion standards and the rights of the data subject," said the letter.

The law approved in principle also empowers the government to exempt whomever it wants from having to adhere to the data protection rights afforded to citizens by the law.

Access Now and Tech Global Institute's letter pointed out that this is susceptible to misuse and recommended removing these provisions to ensure that the government cannot grant "unqualified and unchecked" exemptions.

While the law approved

yesterday now says that a board – instead of an agency, as suggested in previous drafts – will oversee the enforcement of the law, Access Now states that concerns about government control over the supervisory body remain.

"Control over the Data Protection Board and the appellate authority is vested with the government, with the government having the absolute mandate to appoint its members, determine the terms and conditions of their service, and lay down policies that must be complied with while carrying out their functions. An independent regulatory or oversight authority is essential for ensuring the protection of individual rights, particularly because the government and its agencies and instrumentalities are likely

to be large data fiduciaries under the law," it said.

Abu Sayed Md Kamruzzaman, director general at the National Cyber Security Agency, said this law would not be immediately effective.

"The government will issue a gazette specifying a day and the law will take effect from that day," he said in a press conference at the ICT Tower yesterday.

He said it might take at least a year to complete the entire process from passing the law to the formation of a board.

He said the draft would be sent to the law ministry for vetting. Then it would go to parliament. As there is no parliamentary session, they may issue an ordinance in this regard. And later, when parliament is in session, it will be passed.

US policy on free polls

FROM PAGE 12

The US believes in the doctrine of reality and will definitely support a Bangladesh that is grounded on democratic principles, he said, while citing that the US was against Bangladesh's Liberation War in 1971 but once the victory was achieved, they came around.

The other Western countries too are calling for free, fair, participatory and peaceful elections.

"We also want violence-free elections. We alone cannot do it. All parties need to be sincere about it," Momen said.

Asked about the US-Russia statements and counter-statements over Bangladesh elections recently, Momen said the

The other Western countries too are calling for free, fair, participatory and peaceful elections.

government cannot stop them from speaking.

"They are friendly countries and if they advise something good, the government welcomes them. However, we won't accept unnecessary bossing," he said.

For some reason, foreign countries are interfering in Bangladesh's domestic affairs, he said.

"We accept their advice with importance. However, we have a different reality. If they advise, we continuously engage with them," Momen said.

Asked about the withdrawal of sanctions on Rab by the US, he said: "The US is a mature government. For some reason, they sanctioned Rab. We are hopeful the sanctions will be withdrawn soon."

Rift wide open in JP over polls

FROM PAGE 1

Rangpur-3 was JP founder HM Ershad's constituency. After his demise, his son Saad Ershad was elected in a by-election.

Quader will also run from Dhaka-17 while his wife Sherifa Quader will take part in the election from Dhaka-18.

HM Shahriar Asif, a relative of Quader, will run from Rangpur-1. Ranga is the incumbent there.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Saad Ershad yesterday said he wanted party ticket for Rangpur-3, but the leaders loyal to the party chairman did not give him the nomination form.

"They [Quader and his followers] actually want to wipe out the names of HM Ershad's family members. You can visit my electoral area and ask the locals how many development works I have implemented there," he said.

A JP leader loyal to Raushan said the opposition leader has

sought an appointment with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to discuss the elected-related issues.

"We are now waiting for the prime minister's decision regarding the conflict between Raushan Ershad and GM Quader over nominations," the JP leader told this correspondent wishing anonymity.

Golam Moshir, political secretary to the opposition leader, told The Daily Star last night that they were "forced out of the electoral race" which might lead to another split in the JP.

Asked about not naming any candidate for Mymensingh-4, Chunnu at the press conference said, "Raushan Ershad is the honourable chief patron of our party. Showing respect to her, we have not fielded any candidate for that seat."

About not nominating Saad Ershad, he said the lawmaker did not collect and submit the party's

nomination form.

On the issue of Ranga, the JP leader said he was expelled from the party. "How will he get Jatiya Party ticket?"

Regarding the Raushan-Quader conflict, Chunnu said, "If there is any differences between them, it is their family matter. But we don't have any dispute with her in the party."

Although Chunnu said they have named candidates for 289 seats, in fact the figure was found to be 287.

"We have named more than one candidates in some seats due to intra-party conflict in those constituencies," he added.

The JP has named two candidates each in 10 constituencies.

Asked about not nominating Rustum Ali Faraji MP of Pirojpur-3, Chunnu said although he had been involved in the party for long, they now doubt his loyalty.

The main opposition

party in parliament has nominated eight women, including Salma Islam (Dhaka-1).

Chunnu said the JP was assured of a free and fair election. "If the election is free and fair, we will have majority in parliament and assume power."

Irish writer

FROM PAGE 12

of emotional storytelling, bracing and brave."

Lynch, who was previously the chief film critic of Ireland's Sunday Tribune newspaper, said he wanted readers to understand totalitarianism by heightening the dystopia with the intense realism of his writing.

"I wanted to deepen the reader's immersion to such a degree that by the end of the book, they would not just know, but feel this problem for themselves," Lynch said in comments published on the Booker Prize website.