

'Baaji' delivers high-stakes drama in cricket's shadow

SAEED KHAN SHAGOR

In *Baaji*, director Arifur Rahman crafts a narrative that unfolds against the backdrop of intense drama and societal complexities, using the mysterious death of rising cricket star Apu, in Captain Abir's (Tahsan Khan) local team, as its pivot point.

In one scene, Inspector Topu (Manoj Pramanik) and his subordinate drink in a bar. Topu's life is murky, struggling to reconcile with the inevitable compromises of personal and family life. The solo of *Teka O Pakhi* plays in the background.

In its lyrics, the song reflects the elusive nature of money and the high cost of chasing it; *Baaji* seems to serve as a solemn reminder of this familiar truth.

Released on the OTT platform Chorki during Eid-ul-Azha, the star-studded web-series has become one of the festive highlights starring the former celebrity couple Tahsan Khan and Rafiath Rashid Mithila. It also features Mim Mantasha, Nazia Haque Orsha, Shahadat Hossain, Partho Sheikh, Tasnuva Tisha, Abrar Athar, Azharul Hoque Adil, and Manoj Pramanik.

Penned jointly by Aditya Sengupta and Hasanat, the plot unfolds with the mysterious death of rising cricket star Apu, who dies under suspicious circumstances after delivering a stellar performance as Man of the Match.

In investigating his brother's death, Topu begins to unravel a series of puzzles, including rumours linking the country's biggest cricket star Abir to the incident. Topu's informal entry into an exclusive cricket practice session, despite being a nobody in the team, serves as a pivotal yet illogical subplot, driving the story. The episodes are aptly titled with cricket-based jargon like Powerplay, Decision Pending, Strategic Timeout, etc.

Scriptwriter Hasanat endeavours to infuse the screenplay with subplots and dialogues that touch on family life, internal police biases, power dynamics, and the influence of "editor's choice" in journalism.

Though the narrative revolves around betting and its consequences, actual cricket scenes

are minimal. Accordingly, despite its unique framing, the story ultimately culminates in a conventional murder mystery.

However the depiction of betting as a mass-market phenomenon is lacking, instead presenting it as an elite culture. This portrayal, amid the widespread promotion of betting sites, raises questions about the director's target audience. The subplot of Tahsan and Mithila's relationship and their professional reunion with the dialogue – "we are professionals" – serves as a brilliant metaphor.

The recurring tropes in our local series productions, like, infertility in Topu and Renu's marriage and police characters depicted as losers, need reevaluation. However, the script notably gives every character equal space.

The character of Mrs 45, played

fight scenes, nevertheless, lack conviction. His batting scenes are poorly executed with an unconvincing grips and positioning.

Rafiath Rashid Mithila plays a young journalist, Jinia who occasionally loses direction. She is provided hurried efforts to maintain continuity within the storyline. Mithila's performance is commendable, though her screen time is limited compared to others, despite being a major draw in the trailer and marketing strategy.

Cinematographer Suman Sarker, known for his previously notable Bangladeshi projects, adds his personal touch with beautifully framed indoor shots. However, the series struggles to capture the kinetic energy of cricket matches, using a style ill-suited to broadcast sports.



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exceptionally by Nazia Haque Orsha, can single-handedly drive the show. She stands out with her portrayal of a mother, the wife of a disabled man, a family's cornerstone, and a simultaneous ruthless contract killer.

Marking his OTT debut with *Baaji*, Tahsan Khan comfortably handles his role as Abir, whether creating tension through his performance or navigating the strains of his character. However, his portrayal on the field lacks finesse, as his grip on the bat, positioning, execution, and body movements are not convincing.

Although the story's predictable outcome somewhat diminishes Topu's struggles, Manoj Pramanik excels as a brother and performs credibly as an ordinary police officer. His

The editing, including basic tasks like on-screen scoreline updates, is botched. For instance, MH Munna's over is inaccurately marked, and the score remains unchanged in subsequent overs. In another scene, Officer Mokarram Hossain exits at 11:40, but the clock shows 11:30 in the next shot.

Colourist Chinmoy Roy's work is exquisite, particularly in scenes like Topu's mother wearing an abaya indoors. The impact of costumes on colour balance is evident, showcasing how they can greatly influence character portrayal in fiction.

Setting aside technical faults, *Baaji* narrates the story of a societal class crucial to our structure. Their proximity to power may limit audience relatability, yet depicting them in fiction helps viewers understand their real position, marking *Baaji*'s indirect success.

'Toofan' to hit Indian theatres this Friday



Raihan Rafi's film *Toofan*, starring Shakib Khan, will make its international debut on June 28 after premiering on Eid Day (June 17) in 129 theatres across Bangladesh. The film has been consistently drawing growing crowds.

After its regional success and with local theaters extending shows due to its immense audience draw, *Toofan* is set to captivate audiences in West Bengal, India.

Last Friday, Raihan Rafi confirmed that *Toofan* will hit West Bengal theatres on June 28.

The decision to release the film in India comes amid overwhelming demand from audiences. Additionally, the film's co-producer and distributor, India's SVF, has played a significant role in this international release.

Italian Film Festival honours 'Mayna'

The Bangladeshi film *Mayna* ("I Want to Be a Mother"), produced by Alimullah Khokon and directed by Monjurul Islam Megh, has recently been awarded at the Gulf of Naples Independent Film Festival in Italy.



The 10th edition of the festival ran from June 11 to 14 on Naples' beaches. In the competition, *Mayna*, produced by Jaz Multimedia, was the sole Asian film selected.

Mayna was honoured with a "Special Mention Feature Film Award" by the judging panel from a global pool of submissions including films from countries like the USA, Mexico, Spain, and others.

NEWS

Khaleda in Evercare CCU

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He asked for prayers from the public, saying, "I urge everyone to pray for madam's early recovery. May Allah grant her good health."

Khaleda's physician Professor AZM Zahid Hossain said Fakhrul visited the hospital and discussed with the medical board members the BNP chairperson's health condition and treatment.

"Madam is under intensive observation in the CCU. The treatment is ongoing," he said.

Khaleda Zia was rushed to Evercare Hospital in an ambulance around 3:30am as she suddenly fell ill at her residence, "Firoza" in Gulshan.

She was quickly admitted to the CCU, where medical treatment began under the supervision of the medical board.

The medical board members, led by specialist physician Professor Shahabuddin Talukdar, had several meetings to discuss the former prime minister's current condition and her treatment.

Khaleda went to Evercare Hospital on May 1 for a health check-up. During that visit, doctors treated her at the CCU for two days.

The former prime minister, aged 79, has long battled various ailments, including liver cirrhosis, arthritis, diabetes, and issues related to the kidney, lung, heart, and eyes.

Since her conditional release from prison in 2020, the BNP chief has been receiving medical care repeatedly at the hospital under the supervision of a medical board headed by cardiologist Prof Shahabuddin Talukdar.

Khaleda's doctors have been advising sending her abroad since she was diagnosed with liver cirrhosis in November 2021.

On October 26, last year, three US specialist doctors completed a hepatic procedure known as the transjugular intrahepatic portosystemic shunt (TIPS procedure) to stop water accumulation in Khaleda's stomach and chest, and bleeding in her liver.

Spectrum of ties widens

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in terms of trade and energy interdependency, which delivers a win-win scenario for both nations. Meanwhile, Dhaka's economy dictates it sees its future linked with Central and Southeast Asia's markets, in which the geography and bureaucracy of India will continue to play a role.

It was encouraging that the re-elected Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi extended his government's hands to build digital and green partnerships for a sustainable future; Bangladesh's prime minister held forth the necessity of cooperation to make shared waters sustainable.

Noteworthy, Modi reminded his friends of Bangladesh's contribution to India's connectivity needs, which have direct effects on the Indian economy by connecting its hinterland with the cardinal economic hubs. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, as generous as she has been, warmly recognised India's contribution to the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 and, of course, the economic growth that both nations enjoy.

Regionalism was further highlighted during this visit. SAARC and BIMSTEC will continue to be priority institutions in Bangladesh's approach to the regional commonwealth.

SAARC originates in Dhaka, and BIMSTEC's headquarters is also in the Bangladeshi capital. At least, the bilateral talks aim to meaningfully revive BIMSTEC, with Modi's renewed attention to it being a great move.

Not surprisingly, the talks featured defence cooperation – a crucial

aspect in the context of South Asian geopolitics, in the form of defence production to modernise the armed forces.

Bangladesh seeks to diversify and modernise its military capabilities to withstand conventional threats emanating from Myanmar and unconventional threats sweeping in from unmanned sources.

The idea of the practical feasibility of defence cooperation will be put to the test in the coming years as the India-Myanmar-China triad will remain a key boiling point for Dhaka's defence interests.

Moreover, as always, counterterrorism, combating fundamentalism, and peaceful border management were raised during the talks.

But the people in Dhaka and beyond won't hesitate to ask for the specificity of these issues when the global community notes Dhaka's extraordinary capabilities in countering terrorism or extremism.

My best review of this summit-level visit lies in my Machiavellian understanding that foreign relations are not based on charity and that nations will always maximise their national interests.

Teesta basin, for example, is home to around 30 million people, two percent of whom are in Sikkim, 27 in West Bengal, and 71 in northwest Bangladesh. The northwest population is a crucial part of Bangladesh's LDC graduation in 2026.

The question that would loom large is how fast we can solve the issue through our bilateral ties. The Farakka and the other 50 rivers are still dwindling in the public memory. Geostrategically speaking, for

Bangladesh, India is the future of South Asian stability, depending on its success in managing its neighborhood-first policy and the northeast or religious plurality. Meanwhile, for India, Bangladesh is the future of its regional leadership as Bangladesh continues to significantly contribute to the Indian economy and security.

The visit, hence, deserves to be seen as a stocktaking of the past and future based on mutual capabilities and genuineness in commitments.

In terms of politics, Hasina stands firm in parliament with her absolute majority, making her the prime foreign policymaker in Dhaka, while Modi returned to power with the return of coalition politics.

Bangladesh's prime minister has expressed her interest in further involving the new leadership in India in Bangladesh's economy. She has also clearly indicated the need for further talks on a comprehensive economic partnership that should be based on mutual interests by not bypassing its Indo-Pacific partners.

This means the future of bilateral cooperation is astronomically high, but pragmatism and mutual capabilities should be the key determinants if I see Bangladesh's national interest, be it in terms of water management or the politics of external powers.

Therefore, both nations have promised deep cooperation that should be equal-handed in the coming days.

The writer is a professor in international relations and the executive director of Jahangirnagar University's Bangladesh Center for Indo-Pacific Affairs.

Farmers count the losses

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on the sanctuaries so that we can protect the various fish species that have been washed away from local farms and ponds during the flash floods.

Meanwhile, the divisional agricultural extension department reports that farmers in the region are looking at a significant loss of paddy and vegetables, as over 26,000 hectares of farmland have been submerged.

The flood-affected croplands comprise 17,460 hectares of Aush paddy, 1,123 hectares of Aush seedbed, 167 hectares of Aman seedbed, and 7,656 hectares of vegetables.

Mati Lal Halder, a sub-assistant agriculture officer at the divisional DAE, said, "We have not estimated the financial loss yet because a large amount of paddy and vegetables may survive once the water recedes. We will estimate the financial loss once the floodwaters have receded completely."

With only a trace of rainfall and occasional sunny skies, the water level of the Surma River was rapidly receding yesterday, improving the flood situation in vast areas.

The river at Sylhet City Point fell below the danger mark yesterday morning, while it flowed slightly above it at other points.

The flood situation in Moulvibazar and Habiganj is also starting to get better as the water levels in the Manu,

Khowai, and Dhalai rivers fell below the danger marks.

However, the Kushiara River continued to be above the danger level at Fenchuganj point as well as at all other points in Sylhet and Moulvibazar.

Just 2mm of rain fell on Sylhet city in the 24 hours till yesterday morning, while Moheshkhola in Sunamganj recorded the most at 121mm.

The flood situation in the Sylhet region is expected improve in the next 72 hours, according to yesterday morning's forecast by the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre and Water Development Board.

A total of 21.08 lakh people have been affected by the flash floods in Sylhet, Sunamganj, and Moulvibazar districts with 53,244 people residing in the shelter centres as of yesterday afternoon.

In the past three weeks, Sylhet city has been inundated five times due to heavy rains, affecting hundreds of areas and causing untold suffering to the dwellers.

Earlier, on May 29, heavy rains and hill torrents from upstream caused flooding in Sylhet. The flood situation began to normalise on June 8.

However, continuous rains starting in the early hours of June 17 led to another flood in the district.

Prior to this, in May, floods were caused by hill torrents and rains from upstream in India.

Tigers on brink of elimination

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and hope that the Australia-India clash tomorrow in Saint Lucia does not get washed out.

Bangladesh opens Tanzid Tamim (13 off 10) and Liton Das (29 off 31) stitched a 35-run stand – the best showing by the Tigers' openers so far in the tournament – but the required rate of above nine always looked to be out of reach for the Tigers.

Skipper Shanto tried to up the tempo with a few maximums – two in the same over of Pandya and the other off Ravindra Jadeja – but that never put India under any sort of pressure as they managed to maintain a tight

grip throughout the game.

Shanto was dismissed by Jasprit Bumrah in the 16th over, with the Tigers getting reduced to 109 for five. Always struggling to keep pace with the asking rate, Bangladesh headed towards the inevitable as Rishad's 10-ball 24-run cameo – including three maximums and a four – only reduced the margin of defeat.

Earlier, Pandya smashed a quickfire unbeaten 27-ball 50 while Virat Kohli (37 off 28), Rishabh Pant (36 off 28), and Shivam Dube (34 off 24) made 30-odd scores at a brisk pace to propel India, who are almost certain to book a semifinal spot.