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MAISHA ISLAM MONAMEE

In a world where the latest news feels like a doomsday clock's countdown and our personal lives consist of work, bills, and endless scrolling on social media platforms, it is no wonder people flock to OTT-based bling reality shows like moths to a Swarovski-encrusted flame. These

glorified exercises in voyeuristic productions like *Fabulous Lives of Bollywood Wives*, *Selling Sunset*, or even *Bling Empire*, serve a very specific purpose: they remind us that no matter how bad things get in our mundane lives, we can always escape into the sparkly yet vapid vacuum of the ultra-rich behaving badly.

Fabulous Lives of Bollywood Wives, Netflix's current reality juggernaut, has emerged as the reigning queen of this genre, now with an added twist for its third season. As if watching a bunch of well-preserved socialites from Mumbai air-kiss and passively aggressively compete for social supremacy was not enough, the producers decided to introduce a new element – the age-old Delhi vs Mumbai rivalry is now the focal point of this season because apparently there was not enough "drama" in watching Bhavana Panday, Maheep Kapoor, Seema Kiran Sajdeh and Neelam Kothari Soni bicker over exotic holidays.

Adding a few new faces to this reality circus, the Delhi trio – Shalini Passi, Kalyani Saha Chawla, and Ridhima Kapoor Sahni – was brought to heighten the ante. But instead of the spice and tension the show desperately needed, the Delhi cohort feels more like *elaichi in biryani*; unnecessary, disruptive, and slightly irritating. Watching these "high-society" women argue about who throws the better ball is like watching a slow-motion catfight at a garden party. Neither city wins, but they sure do waste a lot of champagne trying.

Let's be real, nobody watches *Fabulous Lives* or similar shows for intellectual stimulation. We do not tune in to learn about art or culture, nor do we expect thought-provoking dialogue. These shows exist to let us, the common folk, gawk at the excessive, over-the-top, and often cringe-worthy antics of the rich and famous. It's the modern version of watching aristocrats parade their wealth

while secretly enjoying seeing them trip over their own egos. *Selling Sunset*, for instance, follows a similar formula. Replace the sarees and Bollywood connections with Los Angeles' multimillion-dollar real estate market, and you have the same guilty-pleasure-inducing ingredients of superficially attractive women who somehow find time to sell luxury homes between backstabbing each other over who is wearing the most Louboutins. *Bling Empire*, on the other hand, is Netflix's attempt at blending the aspirational wealth of *Crazy*

trauma of someone making snark comments about our custom-made yacht. We are also hooked because their problems are so trivial that they make our daily grind seem normal.

What makes these shows truly escapist is the fantasy they offer – the fantasy that wealth and status are the ultimate ticket to happiness. But as *Fabulous Lives* and its ilk unintentionally show us, that is not the case. These women, despite their diamonds, designer outfits, and celebrity connections, are as emotionally unfulfilled as the rest of



Rich Asians with the reality TV chaos of *The Real Housewives*. Here, the Asian elites in Los Angeles flaunt their diamond-encrusted lifestyles while dealing with "relatable problems" like deciding which private jet to take to Paris Fashion Week.

The key to the success of these shows is not their depth, which is about as shallow as the infinity pools they feature. Their hook lies in their ability to offer an escape. These bling shows allow us to forget our problems by indulging in the hollow glitz of other people's excess. It is aspirational content at its gaudiest. Watching these socialites sip champagne in gowns worth more than our yearly rent reminds us that while life may be unfair, at least we do not have to endure the emotional

us. Whether it is Neelam's anxiety over her daughter Googling her or Maheep's endless search for validation, these shows subtly remind us that all the bling in the world cannot buy happiness.

I think the true genius of these shows lies in their self-awareness. They know they are absurd, and they play it up proving their silliness and ability to seem therapeutic. We watch these fabulously empty people live their fabulously empty lives, and we feel better about our own modest existence. We can laugh at Shalini's attempt to play Mother India or at Bhavana's inability to plan a party, and then turn off the TV, safe in the knowledge that we do not have to worry about wearing heels at a pool party in Mauritius.



NEWS

EU stresses polls after reforms

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demonstrate that it is able to take forward reforms. "The ambition is sky high. The pressure from the street is extremely strong and somewhere here there has to be delivery of some quick wins which can still be structural in nature.

"There has to be a process leading to elections. We think it's very important to get that process right and to give this interim government some time to demonstrate that it can reform," he added.

The implementation is the most tricky, Miller said, adding that his message to the advisers is that they are not short of resources.

"We're certainly not short of political will. Please tell us what your priorities are, and then let us work very closely with you. We can do a lot."

As a newcomer arriving at a moment of unprecedented change, Miller now looks forward to supporting the country's transition and reform

ambitions, underpinned by values dear to them both – good governance, democracy and respect for fundamental rights.

GOOD GOVERNANCE ACROSS BOARD

The first round of negotiations on the new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) between Bangladesh and the EU was postponed in August.

The ambassador said they had the

sharing of a text for the new agreement between the EU and Bangladesh, which they shared with the Bangladeshi side

two weeks ago.

The intention of the PCA is to upgrade EU-Bangladesh relations to include a wider range of policy areas, including climate change and security.

"We are now preparing a high level

mission from Brussels, which will come to Dhaka in the first week of November,

and where we will not only discuss this new PCA but also which is upgrade, of course, of the treaty, and also the Joint Commission with the interim

government," Miller said.

There are strong political messages and what is important for the interim government is that the transition has to take place in a smooth manner, he said.

"We wanted to have the ambition to introduce good governance across the board. Of course, this period has to be characterised by respect for the rule of law and human rights, which is what we see," the envoy added.

He said they look forward to working closely with Bangladesh and can do more together in the international organisations.

"For us, what's happening in Ukraine is absolutely central to European security. So, there is no question that this will continue to dominate the political relationship that we have with our partners, including our close partners."

In the wider world, the EU and Bangladesh have been working together for many years to promote multilateral solutions to global challenges.

The state should have the sovereign

ownership of all natural resources, he said, adding that the local companies like Bapex should be strengthened in offshore exploration.

If necessary, foreign consultants and contractors should be appointed, he said.

"The national committee demonstrated against the Rampal power plant and Rooppur nuclear plant, but due to the arrogance of the former premier Sheikh Hasina, AL built those plants that will have an adverse impact on the environment."

The same company that built a nuclear power plant in India for \$5 billion built the Rooppur plant for \$12 billion, he added.

Amending the deals is possible under various international conventions, said Anis Chowdhury, professor emeritus at Western Sydney University in Australia.

The interim government can refuse to pay the debts, he said, adding that Ecuador set examples in this regard.

If the whole system is not changed and just the people, the change will not be sustainable, said economist MM Akash.

People want power and energy at cheaper rates, which should be fixed under a transparent process, he said.

Female students recount years of torment

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my experience. This should have been resolved long ago. Political power acted as a obstacle."

Min shared her ordeal at a discussion titled "Testimonies of Harassed Female Students and the Responsibility of Creating a Discrimination-free Educational Environment", organised by the Education Rights Council at the RC Majumdar Arts Auditorium at Dhaka University yesterday.

The event was moderated by Md Shahnewaz Khan Chandan, member-secretary of the council and assistant professor at JNU's Education and Research Institute.

Among those who shared similar stories were Khadizatul Kubra from JNU, Joyma Moomoon from Eden College, and Synthia Mehrin Sakal from DU.

Fulpuri Khatun, a student of Islamic University, joined the event virtually and spoke about the torture she had to endure by some Chhatri League activists in 2023, which nearly forced her to drop out.

"As a first-year student, I witnessed a culture of intimidation and ragging. New students were pressured to greet others [the activists] with 'salam' at every step on the staircase. Those who did not, would face dire consequences."

She remembered being detained and tortured by BCL female activists for four and a half hours, during which

they forced her to write a suicide note stating that if she died, no one would be held responsible.

"If university administrations aren't held hostage by political parties, we can create a safe and secure campus for all students."

Khadizatul Kubra opened up about her harrowing experience of spending a year in jail under the oppressive Digital Security Act, despite having committed no crimes.

Even while battling kidney disease, she faced relentless setbacks as a Dhaka court repeatedly denied her bail.

"After enduring such injustice, I was deeply disappointed that no one from my department stood by me. The behaviour I received from some teachers hurt me the most. The harassment I faced during the viva board was incredibly painful for me."

Synthia Mehrin Sokal, a participant in the quota reform movement at DU, said, "On July 15, Chhatri League activists chased me on the campus and struck me in the head with a rod. I heard a loud bang in my ear and then collapsed... I thought I was dying."

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Joyma Munmun shared how the Chhatri League for 15 years had

dominated the university halls, forcing students into political activities and subjecting those who resisted to mental and physical abuse.

Professor M Niaz Asadullah, convener of the Education Rights Council and professorial fellow at North South University, presided over the event.

In his speech, he said, "The education system may be faltering, but the youth remains resilient. That gives us hope. Today, we focused on one aspect of our 14-point agenda. Moving forward, we'll focus on other reforms, ensuring that inclusivity and youth participation are at the heart of all educational endeavours."

Professor Hosne Ara Begum, former director of DU's Institute of Education and Research, said, "There should be no political influence in the relationship between teachers and students."

Professor Dr Chowdhury Saima Ferdous, of DU's international business department, said, "I feel ashamed as a teacher after hearing the struggles of the girls at this event. While we knew about the abuses in the dormitories, we were unaware of the details."

Dr Monirul Rashid, of DU's Institute of Education and Research, said, "To create discrimination-free educational environments, we must ensure good governance. Teachers must fulfil their roles as educators, and we need to dismantle the culture of student politics that fosters dependency."

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