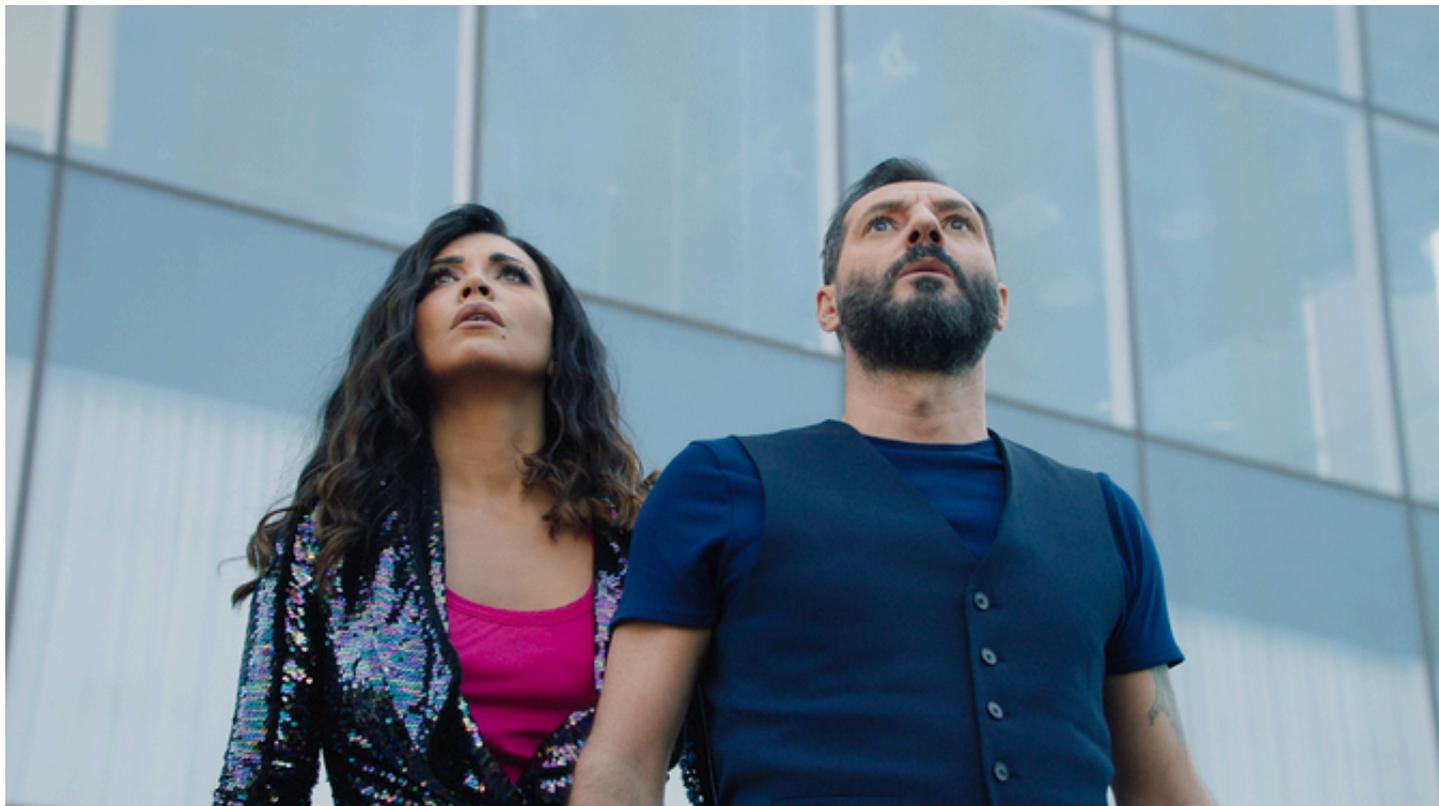


Arabic-language 'Dollar' on Netflix struggles to provide its worth



- Unfortunately, “Dollar” often resembles an exaggerated, over-the-top Bollywood work

CHENNAI: A fast-expanding Netflix, eager to penetrate markets across continents, has been creating original content in, among other languages, Arabic. The latest is “Dollar,” a 15-episode web series by Syria's Samer Barqawi (“Al Hayba”). Dubbed and subtitled in several languages, the plotline is amazingly novel, with a bank circulating a currency bill in the streets of Beirut and promising to award a million dollars to whoever ends up with it at the end of a specified period. This, the bank feels, would be a brilliant promotion for its inauguration.

In episode after episode, Dollar takes us through unbelievable moments with the bank's no-nonsense executive assistant, Zeina (played by Algerian-Lebanese actress Amel Bouchoucha), and an advertising wizard, Tarek (Lebanese comedian Adel Karam), chasing the piece of paper through the city.

There are hilarious times, and there are tense minutes when the two are caught in a web of sticky situations. When the dollar – whose serial number is with Zeina – is transformed into a rose by a street magician but later discovered in his van, escapes the duo's reach, the disappointment merely firms up their never-say-die attitude.

Zeina and Tarek's misadventures push them into a den of thugs, and Tarek almost loses his life. At other times, a desperate Zeina, who must somehow get her hands on her share of the prize money, a whopping half a million dollars, even agrees to belly-dance for a hardcore crime syndicate boss. After a trip to a beauty parlor, a movie set and a suicidal professor's house, the couple end up in a parking lot with the bill tantalisingly close.

Barqawi does manage to weave a mind-boggling variety into his episodes, but the chapters are one too many to sustain uniform excellence. While Bouchoucha is expressive, reliving the pain and pathos of a callous fiancé and constant disappointments, she tends to over-perform. And Karam, an otherwise intelligent actor whom we saw in the Lebanese film “The Insult,” which was nominated for an Oscar in 2018, appears too stiff as the man behind the bank's publicity plan who quickly turns into a ruthless pursuer of wealth.

Unfortunately, “Dollar” often resembles an exaggerated, over-the-top Bollywood work, a tendency some recent Arab films made for the big screen have been able to avoid with fantastic results.
