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Farce and Reality Meet in 'Four Lions'

By Nick Dowson

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The inept suicide bombers dress up in costumes for an attempt to blow themselves up at the London Marathon.

In the wake of the Domodedovo bombing, Chris Morris' film "Four Lions," a comedy about Yorkshire suicide bombings, might seem to be the last film you would want to open in Moscow cinemas.

Yet three Moscow cinemas went ahead with screenings of the film within days of the bombing last month, with 35MM cinema showing the premiere just hours after the tragedy.

None of the cinemas chose to cancel or delay viewings of the film in the aftermath of the bombing at Domodedovo last month, which killed 36 people.

"The premiere was unfortunate timing. It is a difficult time for us," said Nadya Kotova, director of programming at 35MM. "If you watch it, you will understand that it's a good movie, about people, not just about terrorists and terrorism."

The film follows a group of five idiotic "jihadis" as they try to plan a terror attack. Descending quickly into farce, Morris shows their mixed-up ideas and slapstick arguments as they blow themselves up, but achieve little else.

The would-be terrorists' arguments are more confused and nihilist than fundamentalist, and the viewer comes to feel almost sorry for them for the pain they inflict on themselves through their warped ideas.

Pioner's PR director Roman Krupnov said the cinema thought seriously about canceling screenings of the film, but was unable to because the film's distributor, Ruscico, would not cancel the release of the film. "We have a contract with them. We had no way to cancel it. I think it's a good film, with good humor, but the wrong time to show it because of the terrorist act," Krupnov said. "We understand that some people might be upset."

No one at the Pyat Zvyozd cinemas, which also showed the film, was available for comment.

Yury Pivovarov, PR director at distributor Ruscico, told The Moscow Times that when the bombing at Domodedovo happened it was too late to cancel the premiere at 35MM and that Ruscico was constrained by various commitments to its partners.

"This terrible coincidence shows that terrorism is also very urgent for our country as well as Britain," he said. "It's not the case that you have to be afraid and cancel everything. We did, however, refrain from much of our advertising and a few important articles about the film after the events at Domodedovo."

"'Four Lions' is a very courageous response to terrorist events, in the U.K. and around the world. Though the filmmakers satirize suicide bombers and all the hysteria around terrorism, the sidesplitting jokes are contrasted with the gravity of the really terrible events described in the film. The film is not as flippant as it might seem at first."

The film was also the choice for a showing by KinoKlub, an independent cinema club set up by the F5 magazine, that staged a discussion of the film afterwards.

Olga Papernaya, artistic director of KinoKlub, admitted that "here we aren't yet ready to talk about the problem at the level that Chris Morris proposes."

Indeed, the debate did not discuss suicide bombing attacks in Russia in any depth at all. When one of the invited participants, journalist Nazim Nadirov, attempted to talk about what he saw as the causes of terrorism, moderators complained that he was going off topic.

"The Ingush were deported from their homes during World War II and were never given back the rights to them. No one has apologized to them," he said before being cut off. He then walked out of the debate.

Police have identified Magomed Yevloyev from Ingushetia as the bomber at Domodedovo.

"Four Lions" is currently on at Pyat Zvyozd-Novokuznetskaya. www.5zvezd.ru

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