

## IN MEMORIAM

Abu Sayeed Mahmud was the founding managing director of Mediaworld, owning company of The Daily Star. Today we pay tribute to him on his third death anniversary.

## In memory of a patriot

SHAH AMS KIBRIA

**M**Y mind was overcome with sorrow when I heard the news of Abu Sayeed Mahmud passing away. "He left us for good with unrequited emotions," wrote a Daily Janakantha columnist. It might as well have been so. If Mahmud left us with detestation towards the BNP-Jamaat government, it is only understandable. I don't think the nation has yet forgiven the government for closing down a popular institution like ETV.

I became acquainted with Abu Sayeed Mahmud quite some time ago, during the 80s, when he was the president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce. His enlightened conversation impressed me. I noticed that the prime focus of his discussions always centered on new initiatives that would benefit our nation and society. It was during the early 90s, when I returned home for good, that I became close to him. Unnoticed, the acquaintance quickly turned into friendship.

I was particularly attracted by his respect and support for honest journalism as the managing director of The Daily Star. At that time he was known as a successful entrepreneur among Dhaka's civil society. His etiquette and politeness, and his interest in cultural activities, are signified by his family's participation in literary and cultural enterprises. During the advent of The Daily Star, my late friend SM Ali often held long discussions with me in Bangkok. A young Mahfuz Anam would participate in those discussions, too.

During that time, the presence of a successful businessman and initiator like Mahmud gave those discussions practical meaning by converting the ideas into a robust business initiative. Only Mahmud could collate different investors to establish an English daily with such success.

Abu Sayeed Mahmud was associated with many institutions. However, he will be forever remembered in this country as the founder of ETV. Erstwhile Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina was interested in establishing a neutral and independent television channel in

the world of electronic media. Anticipating delays in making the government channel completely independent, she hastened the process of change by initiating a private channel instead.

It was through her interest and enthusiasm that ETV was born. In retrospect, I must admit that in establishing that channel Abu Sayeed Mahmud had done justice to the trust and confidence that was placed upon him. He was not only satisfied with associating successful Bengali industrialists as investors in his institution, he even added a well-known American institutional investor.

By placing Simon Dring, a great friend of Bangladesh, a dedicated soul and an experienced journalist, at the helm of the operations of the station, he proved his belief in professionalism and decentralized management. The fact that he wanted to establish a channel at par with international excellence was apparent by the role of Simon Dring.

The selection of the name Ekushey TV reveals Mahmud's deep patriotism. He was a patriotic Bengali who believed in the ideals of the Liberation War of Bangladesh. He also had unadulterated reverence for Bangabandhu. I saw his love for the Bengali language and culture reflected in everything he said and did. However, we later learnt, it was this very name, Ekushey TV, that became a matter of great contention for the government. Jaamat-e-Islami quite naturally considered Ekushey TV an enemy.

It is no surprise then that Mahmud, too, a believer in the spirit of the Liberation War, would become a matter of displeasure in their eyes. They did not try to hide the fact that the real allegiance of the Jamaat-BNP coalition belonged to the spirit of 1947.

It was reported in some magazines that the channel was closed down due to legal issues. There could have been some legal, or even technical, issues; but the real reason for the closure is not a secret to anyone. In fact, everyone in the fraternity of the news media knew that the four-party coalition could not tolerate ETV's neutrality



and their independent news presentation, which was much anticipated and appreciated by the rest of the nation.

Ever since coming to power, a different kind of pressure was exerted to align the electronic media in line with the coalition government's wishes. Even after the closure of ETV, the government's vindictiveness did not calm down; there has been news of pressure on the other two channels as well. It is evident on the television screen everyday. I suppose the idea of quality independent news presentation in the electronic media of Bangladesh has practically died.

ETV had started certain alternative programs with the enthusiasm provided by Abu Sayeed Mahmud. He wanted to portray the true images of rural Bangladesh. It was the result of his progressive thinking that the representatives of the poor and the downtrodden found a voice in that channel. By creating a program with young children, ETV not only encouraged in the young minds a deep interest in the television medium, but also in the field

of journalism. In essence, ETV was like a sudden burst of light in the world of television in Bangladesh. What is sad is that this light was almost abruptly put out.

Abu Sayeed Mahmud's dead body was laid to rest abroad. A patriot of his stature must have decided not to return to his country with much sadness and emotion. The evil forces that were behind the closure of ETV are still active today. I believe that, in the days to come, the nation's patriots who believe in democracy will keep on fighting against them. Abu Sayeed Mahmud's work remains unfinished. It is his countrymen who will have to bring it to conclusion.

In respect to him, I would like to say: "Your work may have remained unfinished, but has not failed." As expressed in the words of our great poet, Rabindranath: *The unbloomed flower that fell on earth*  
*The river that lost its trail in desert*  
*Oh I know, I know it is not yet lost.*

Shah AMS Kibria was Finance Minister, 1996-2001. Translated from Bengali by Ahsanul Akbar.

## Dreams never die

As Mahmud breathed his last on this day in 2004, many said aloud: "Dreams are dead too." Young and old, men and women, whoever had known AS Mahmud from far and near knew that not only had he dreams of his own, he also knew how to teach the younger generation to have its own dreams. Once, in a television interview, he was asked to talk about his favorite hobby, to which he had replied: "Aami jege jege shopno dekhi (I dream while awake)"

REZA CHOWDHURY

**O**NE of Bangladesh's leading businessmen, founder chairman of Ekushey Television (ETV), a groundbreaking, a patriot, an innovator and a man committed to the future development of his country. AS Mahmud died in London three years ago on this day in 2004.

Mahmud was born on July 10, 1933, into a reputed family from Sylhet. He passed BA (Hons) in economics from Dhaka University in 1954, and started his career as an oil company executive in Burma Shell.

Mahmud paved a new path in the electronic and print media in Bangladesh. Not only was he the founder chairman of the country's first private terrestrial television channel, ETV, he was also the founder-director, and subsequently publisher and managing director, of The Daily Star, the country's most successful English-language newspaper.

He was also the founder director, and subsequent chairman, of the Reliance Insurance Company Ltd, a director of the Infrastructure Development Company Ltd (IDCOL), founded by the World Bank and the government of Bangladesh.

Among the many positions held, Mahmud was formerly: president, Dhaka Chamber of Commerce; a member, the National Pay Commission; and a member, the World Bank's Industrial Development Council.

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Like all true dreamers, Mahmud was an intensely emotional man, and it was with such true emotion that he loved his country, the people he had worked with, and all the children whom he wished to see growing up to realize the dreams of a better Bangladesh. Yet, AS Mahmud was not a politician.

In the early sixties, as a young executive of an oil company, Mahmud had to spend good many years in the areas of Faridpur, Rangpur, Dinajpur, and Chittagong. He had to tour by train, boat and on foot through the villages, river ports and railway stations of the country. He developed a strange affinity with the simple village folks who were, in his words, better human beings than the wealthy urban people.

In 1961, I had a memorable trip to Calcutta with him and Mrs Mahmud, my sister, to attend the Tagore centenary celebrations. It was probably after watching Satyajit Ray's "Tin Kanya" the trilogy and "Rabindranath," the documentary, that he had grown an obsession to produce a feature film.

On this trip, we could not make it together to Santiniketan due to shortage of funds. It was something we all regretted because we could not meet his maternal uncle Dr Syed Mujtaba Ali, then living in Santiniketan.

During the following four decades Mahmud never got rid of that obsession, and had often mentioned it during talks with friends or relations, young or old. When ETV went on air, I once reminded him of his longtime wish, to which he had said yes.

Now, after all, he could achieve even much more, but he wanted the younger generation to be able to use ETV as a platform for some-

thing bigger. Mahmud continued to dream with a vision for the future, but never became a dream merchant.

The political events of 1970 and early 1971 had already made him very sad. Often he talked of our immediate course of action for the future. Mahmud was then a deputy general manager of Pakistan National Oils, which was later named Jamuna Oil Co.

He had once confided to me that he would leave East Pakistan,

rather than be a part of the system where he would have to ensure smooth supply of oil to the Pakistani army from the depots or terminals near Narayanganj.

A source close to the Pakistani army had tipped him off in time that his name was already in the list of people who had been under watch by the military intelligence. How he, with his wife and three children, fled the country for England is another story.

Mahmud arrived in London and was lucky to get a job in the accounts section of the noted London department store Harrods, where he worked for several months before returning to independent Bangladesh.

After his death in 2004, there were letters from all over coming to his family and friends.

There was one very touching reminiscence of him by a young man named Rashid Mamun of New York who had earlier worked briefly at ETV:

"It was great fortune that I got to know him from close distance. He was a man of great dignity and virtue. I used to work for ETV on commission. One of my documentaries, Shatibdir Alo, was telecast on ETV, (later on it was stopped for an unknown reason). During that time I got to know him better, always a well dressed man taking care of everyone and everything like a grandfather. When, at his age, the people of our country

think about retirement or already go into retirement, he started a new venture called ETV where he promoted and inspired young people like me. Because of his leadership in ETV, everyone worked as a family. There was the kinship, a bond that made ETV an exception. As Mahfuz Anam said, 'ETV was a gift to the people of Bangladesh,' it really was. We come from a country where people don't dare to dream, but AS Mahmud was the man who taught us how to dream and go after it. If we dream, we can achieve those dreams and make a difference. ETV was a great example. But I wonder what we gave him back?"

Then there was one Ezajur Rahman from Kuwait who wrote:

"I never knew AS Mahmud. I would have loved to know him. He has given me something very intimate and very personal -- he has given me the confidence to try and make a difference. The Daily Star and ETV remain beacons of hope that good, on a large scale, can be done in the face of all odds.

People like me, and there are many, grabbed ETV and The Daily Star as adequate justification for our physical and emotional investment in Bangladesh. Making a charitable donation is easy. But leading the way into the 21st century is the stuff of heroes. AS Mahmud is a hero and role model for me. I thank him on behalf of myself and the many we know who fell in love with ETV and The Daily Star. I will never forget the faces of kids in London when they watched "Desh Jure" on ETV. AS Mahmud was a great man. He is an inspiration to all those who believe in a better Bangladesh."

And there were many more. As someone close to AS Mahmud, I have always felt that the country had lost a true patriot and a dreamer three years back. In today's Bangladesh, we miss him more than ever. He was the one who made a lot many people believe that there must be a vision for the future, and for that we must also learn to dream of happier days and a glorious Bangladesh.

Dreams never die.

Reza Chowdhury, a businessman, is a relation of AS Mahmud.

## Maissa and Marcia -- fated to be friends

Only a day apart in age, Maissa and Marcia, over a twenty-year period always had joint birthday celebrations. Maissa Karim, aged 31, passed away on July 5, 2006 in London. Marcia Jayasuria, Senior Manager, Standard Bank of South Africa, London, will be thirty-two on January 23. She will not be celebrating her birthday this year.

I think Maissa would find it both amusing and ironic that I am writing a piece about her, as most of the time, it has always been her essays about us! In fact, just the other day, I was going through some of my things from school and found some of her pieces. She was always so great at telling stories about all her life adventures and putting them to paper in the most amazing way. I, on the other hand, find it a very difficult thing to do, to try to describe my best friend of almost 20 years.

I suppose I will start at the very beginning, for both of us. Maissa and I had a lot in common, even before we ever met. We were born, both premature, half a world apart, in Germany and Malaysia, just a day apart, on the 22nd and 23rd of January, 1975. Even with our vastly different ethnic heritages, our parents somehow even managed to come up with similar names for us -- Maissa Marcia and Marcia Maissa. It just had to be that when we met, at the age of 12, in 1987 that we would be friends.

This did not come about immediately, however, as I would say our true friendship really started when we were 13, sharing a room in boarding school at United World College, Singapore. I have so many happy memories of our times at UWC, and all our mini-adventures, shopping on Orchard Road, boarder exchanges, Maissa persuading me to take part in the Bangladesh dance for Asian evening, lots of chocolate Teddy Grahams, the Gummy Bear dance, slogging through the smelly mangrove mud in

Malaka, and of course the infamous "Let's sneak out of the boarding house at night and pinch the Milo from the canteen" adventure! Needless to say, in most of these things, Maissa was definitely the ringleader, working her formidable powers of persuasion even in those early years.

Having both successfully passed our GCSEs in 1991 we made our way to England to continue with our International Baccalaureate studies. This was of course, another great idea of Maissa's! Having visited Atlantic College (sister school to UWC Singapore) in Wales during a summer holiday in the UK, and although somewhat taken aback by its rural nature, what with the green fields, the sheep, and the fact that one had to post camera film to be developed, and given our very urban Singapore surroundings, Maissa managed to persuade me that it was a good idea to apply. We both applied for the transfer, only to find out that after my transfer was confirmed, that Maissa was actually going to attend Sevenoaks School in Kent instead. Leaving me on the rural Welsh coast while Maissa ended up less than an hour away from London by train.

We may have been a few miles further apart than we were used to but we made sure we saw each other frequently on trips to London or visiting our respective schools. Introduction to life in the United Kingdom was somewhat eased by the fact that we had each other. After doing well in our International Baccalaureate final exams in 1993,

we both moved to London for university. Maissa, having been accepted at several universities of her choice, including the LSE, decided to pursue a joint degree in geography and development studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, (I read Economics at the LSE). By our third year, we were sharing a flat in Lancaster Gate, with our friend Justine, from our UWC Singapore days, who was also at LSE. After graduating at the age of 21, with upper second class degrees, we stayed on in London, finding jobs and new friends, having a great time in our 20s. Maissa's career started at British Telecom, where she excelled, winning the BT Recognition Award in the first six months. She went on to work in marketing and communication, working finally as an account executive with Masius Inc, a Groupe Publicis company, one of the largest advertising companies in the world.

It was during this period, in June 2004, at the age of 29, that Maissa was diagnosed with a brain tumour. After the initial devastating shock, Maissa maintained a positive attitude, taking the radiation and chemotherapy treatment in her stride, continuing to pursue her life goals with what could only be an even greater zest.

Maissa returned to the UK in September 2005 to pursue an MBA at the Judge Business School, Cambridge. I was lucky to be in New York on the day the acceptance came through and I remember how happy and proud she was of the achievement. And if the acceptance was not enough, Judge Business School also awarded Maissa with the Directors Scholarship, worth £5,000, awarded on the basis of merit to outstanding MBA candidates with exceptional academic backgrounds, considerable success in their careers and strong GMAT scores. Maissa through and through!

Unfortunately Maissa was not able to complete the course due to the recurrence of her illness. However, Judge Business School, as a special recognition of her

determination to succeed in her MBA program, will be awarding a special certificate to Maissa in May 2007, at the graduation ceremony of the rest of her class. And more, Judge Business School has set up a scholarship, to be named the "Directors Maissa Karim Scholarship" in recognition of Maissa's tenacity and spirit. Everywhere she went, Maissa made her mark, and it appears that Cambridge was no exception.

Maissa had the most amazing gift for making friends. This may have seemed effortless to many but I know how much time and energy Maissa put into getting to know people and keeping in touch with them. Maissa was always willing to open herself up to people, to help them get to know her, and I think, people responded to this honesty and genuine sincerity, cementing what turned out to be incredible friendships wherever she went in the world. She was also incredibly generous in sharing her friendships, making her social circle into a family. It is clear to me that many of the relationships I have with people in London have been because of Maissa. Her social network was unparalleled. When we meet and are together, we will always remember her. There is no doubt amongst all of us that Maissa was our social queen.

Maissa was always the more intrepid, daring and adventurous one amongst her friends. Her adventurous spirit and curiosity must have been instilled at an early age from living in so many countries from such a young age, learning to meet and mix with different people and cultures. Maissa was always looking for a new experience, to travel to new places and make sure she saw everything worth seeing.

I have so many memories of

great holidays -- Zanzibar, Tanzania, New York, Miami, Boston, Paris, Cornwall, Bangladesh, Kuala Lumpur, Prague, and a great time spent in Greece, with Maissa "persuading" me that it was a good idea to let her drive the jeep, even though she did not have a licence. Of course we survived the experience! She was also such a sense of fun and you know you could count on seeing everything worth seeing if she had her way about it.

I cannot actually put into words how proud I am of Maissa and being her friend. She was so special and had so many achievements and really lived life. She was so many things to so many people, fun loving, spirited, serious, good to talk to, beautiful, cultured, always willing to share her experiences, open, friendly, loyal, the list goes

on. Most of all I know she cherished and loved her family and friends, and always made sure she kept in touch, with no detail of her life being small to share. On top of all these things, Maissa was so incredibly strong, amazing all of us, and perhaps even herself, ultimately proven by the way in which she handled her illness, yet still following her dreams and ambitions. She bore the burden so quietly, compared to how she shared everything else in her life, with such composure, dignity and strength. Whenever I now think that something cannot be done, or will not work, I will remember Maissa, and do my best to try it out anyway.

Even though in recent years we had not lived in the same city or country, we always stayed in close contact and remained aware of the ins and out of each other's lives. Some months have passed now since Maissa's passing and I feel sadder and sadder every day, as the true reality hits. Not only have I lost my sister and my best friend, I feel like I have lost a part of my history, and a part of my future.

I very much miss the little songs she used to make up to sing, the inane conversations about what she had to eat on any given day; I miss the feeling of her hand on my arm as we walked along the street, slightly holding back my fast pace so that she could keep up, constantly chattering the whole time. I miss all the constant questions she would ask, which I never seemed to have the right answers for. I miss her laughing and the sound of her voice. I miss Maissa.

