

# The Daily Star

FOUNDER/EDITOR  
LATE S. M. ALI

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## The Daily Star at 25

WHAT seemed the other day has been 25 years! We have lived through very interesting times, and time flies when redolent with interesting events. And since then we have been witness to developments in the country in various fields. And we hope that we have been able to carry these developments to the readers in their correct perspectives, both in essence and substance.

We take pride in the fact that our birth coincided with the restoration of democracy in the country. And it is democracy and its attendant ancillaries that have been the main focus of this newspaper. We have never relented in calling for an unadulterated participatory democracy whose central focus should be the people, and we can take singular pride in our role as an unyielding critic of violent politics and *hartal* and boycott of Parliament.

As we look back into the years that we have left behind, we draw satisfaction from the fact that our relentless support for freedom of press and freedom of speech has contributed, in whatever small measure, to the state of free media that we have today in Bangladesh. And we can justly claim that our role in the last 25 years demonstrates that a vibrant independent media is possible here.

We have been consistent critic of abridgement of the rule of law and human rights caused by extrajudicial actions of the state agencies, and have fearlessly called for the punishment of the culprits, whoever that might be.

And for all this the groundwork was laid by four very distinguished persons of the country who, in their own right, had achieved fame even before joining *The Daily Star*. As we complete a quarter of a century of "Journalism without Fear or Favour", it is only fitting that we recall the contributions of the four founding members of *The Daily Star* who ventured literally into the unknown with a group of young journalists with the single minded vision of giving journalism in Bangladesh a new face, imbued with the idea of upholding the motto - YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW.

Mr. S M Ali, the founding Editor, gave us the intellectual leadership with the current editor by his side, while Mr. Azimur Rahman provided the overall guidance as the chairman; Mr. A S Mahmud gave the managerial guidance with Mr. Tawfiq Aziz Khan ably managing the daily affairs of the nascent newspaper. All of them are now departed, and to each and every one of them we owe a huge debt of gratitude.

Over the years, we have expanded the ambit of our responsibility to society through honouring various personalities and institutions who have contributed to the development of the country. We have also recognised the contribution of the youth to society by honouring young leaders and young achievers in schools and college certificate exams.

And if we have been able to achieve all that, it has been possible only because of the support and trust of our readers, patrons, and well-wishers. Without your feedback and criticism, sometimes very harsh, we would not have been able to live up to the high standards that we had set for ourselves. We have treaded a long distance and the journey has been pleasurable and rewarding, knowing that we had the unstinted support of our readers, and for that we are eternally grateful to all of you.

We will leave it to the readers to judge whether we have lived up to your expectations and whether we have acquitted ourselves well in fulfilling our responsibility to the people and the country. But we would like to assert that when it came to fairness, integrity, objectivity and honesty in treating and covering an event, we did not compromise on any.

However, it has not been an easy ride for us. Journalism is not without its inherent hazards anywhere in the world since hard truths are seldom accepted with grace. But in spite of that we have not compromised on the issue of freedom of speech, on the issue of minority rights, and on the values that motivated and sustained the Liberation War which continue to guide us.

As we look to the future, we look with great hope, that in our journey into the next decade and further, we will be able to remove our shortcomings, whatever they may be, and uphold the true spirit of journalism reflected in our motto in serving the people and the country.

### THE THIRD VIEW



MAHFUZ ANAM

AFTER months of planning, weeks of dummy runs, the paper was finally rolling out of the press on the night of 13th January, 1991. I was tense with suppressed

excitement, heart beating fast, hands sweating, one held firmly by my wife Shaheen, who said "I am so happy your dream is coming true".

A quarter of a century ago, seven of us got together, led by one famous journalist Mr SM Ali and followed by one eager young man (yours truly), along with five visionary entrepreneurs - AS Mahmud, Azimur Rahman, A Rouf Chowdhury, Latifur Rahman and Shamsur Rahman - to decide to bring out a newspaper. I express my profound respect to the memory of those whom we lost along the way of our 25-year-

become the purveyor of good taste, decency and tolerance. We wanted to reestablish our sense of pride, not through false narratives but with achievements in every aspect of our life.

It was a crucial time when we started our journey because Bangladesh had just come out of a long spell of dictatorship and democracy was beginning to stretch its wings. We knew that strong, independent and robust journalism, was a precondition for a healthy democracy; and felt, that creating an INDEPENDENT VOICE in the form of a newspaper that would speak freely and boldly, was the best way we could serve the nation at that crucial juncture. We knew that there was so much of hunger, poverty and corruption to write about. We realised that the voice of the poor and the powerless, muted by the roar of the powerful, remained unheard and needed to be listened to and brought into the public domain as well as into policy debates.

We felt that howsoever the society may be divided, there was an urgent

prosperity and equality other than democracy. For that we have been persecuted and harassed. We have relentlessly argued for a functioning parliament and criticised political parties for their practice of parliament boycott and reckless calling of hartals.

The theme we have pursued relentlessly is accountable governance. Without good governance, without rule of law, without transparency and accountability, a nation cannot progress. *The Daily Star* has been at the forefront to point out these lapses. We have tried to form public opinion through our discourses, often not confined to the pages of the newspaper, but in roundtables and dialogues.

We have rejoiced at the prosperity and growth of our country. Our anniversary supplement's theme "On high road to progress" is just the latest assertion of this. We have searched out the achievers and doers in various fields be it science, literature, politics, business, education or just simple down to earth agriculture and highlighted their glory to instill a

the best and brightest of our students in the O and A level examinations revealing the comparative intellectual ability of our young in this international and highly competitive examination. It greatly helped to generate a new self confidence among our students by this public exposure of their abilities which had not happened before the advent of *The Daily Star*.

Our Bangladesh Business Award truly exposed the innovative and entrepreneurial excellence of our business community and gave them that crucial boost that they needed to achieve higher levels of performance. It was a natural offshoot of our deep commitment to business journalism which *The Daily Star* was a pioneer in.

Our "Celebrating Life" Awards for the lyricist, photographers and film producers and the subsequent production of CDs of the best lyrics, exhibition of the best photographs and financial support for film production have helped to galvanize these creative fields.

Our initiative for "Climate" and "Junior Climate Awards" was in keeping with the needs of time and most appropriate for Bangladesh.

I would like to conclude with the challenges that we are likely to face, the foremost of which being the coming Digital Age.

Information technology will change everything as we know-some of it will be devastating for those who will resist change but for those prepared for change it will open up new and magnificent avenues for the growth of journalism. Newspapers will be read more on its digital platforms which will release us from the confines of limited space, newsprint supply and price, challenges of quality printing and distribution hassles. This will lead to huge cost savings which wise publishers and editors will spend on developing human resources and technology.

The most important point to ponder is that flooded with numerous news channels and sources, readers will converge to ones that are authentic, credible and ethical. We believe, that in this new world created by technology, the core values of journalism will resurface. Thus journalism, real, ethical and value based, will reassert itself-creating to, I predict, a return to centre stage, ethical journalism.

In conclusion, we say without hesitation, that we will continue to stay on course of objective journalism, making *The Daily Star* a stronger and louder Independent Voice, in every sense.

Bangladesh is on the verge of a development spurt driven by new energy of the young, new confidence of our entrepreneurs, new success of our NGOs, new vision of our leaders.

With the noble profession of journalism as our full time duty, we, my colleagues and myself, pledge before you, that *The Daily Star* will remain committed to democracy, fundamental freedoms, especially media freedom, secularism, equitable development and work towards a knowledge based society and do so with the highest degree of honesty, integrity and dedication to ethical journalism.

I conclude with a saying of Thomas Jefferson: "Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter." Ours is not to ask you to make such a choice but to appreciate the fundamental role that media plays in a healthy flowering of a free society. Thank you.

The writer is Editor & Publisher of *The Daily Star*.



The Daily Star's present newsroom.

PHOTO: STAR

long journey : Founding editor SM ALI, founding managing director AS Mahmud, founding chair Azimur Rahman and founding managing editor Tawfiq Aziz Khan. They gave us a brilliant start which has helped us achieve whatever modest success that we have had so far.

It was, no doubt, an unlikely group. None of our investors had anything ever to do with media. The reason we were tempted was not so much by the prospect of a money making media industry - for back then it was still on shaky ground - but by a burning desire to contribute to the growth of Bangladesh, just released from the shackles of autocracy. We dreamt of strengthening fundamental freedoms, serving the nation and upholding the values of our Liberation War, especially that of democracy and secularism.

We felt the need to modernise our society and the tool we chose was journalism. The path we picked was telling the truth - objectively, accurately and in its full breath. We wanted to

need to converge on crucial issues of politics, economy, industry, education, health, environment and good governance. We were fully conscious that the fractious nature of the existing society required a healing process which a non-partisan and independent newspaper could be a catalyst for. This, we thought, could be done by acting as a bridge between differing social groups, contending stakeholders and contesting political parties.

And we knew that outside the realm of policymaking process, meaning without being a part of the political process, journalism was the best profession to influence the realisation of the above tasks.

For the last twenty five years, we have been unflinching in supporting the cause for a free press no matter how difficult the challenges have been, because we believe that a free and independent press is a fundamental prerequisite for a vibrant democracy. Even in the most trying times, we have repeatedly written that there is no alternative path to

sense of achievement in our national psyche.

We have always tried to serve the public interest beyond any other concern. We have written how the all powerful are grabbing our rivers, railway land and breaking the laws. We have stood behind the weak and the poor in their struggle against the mighty, often the state machinery. No amount of intimidation could deter us from our mission.

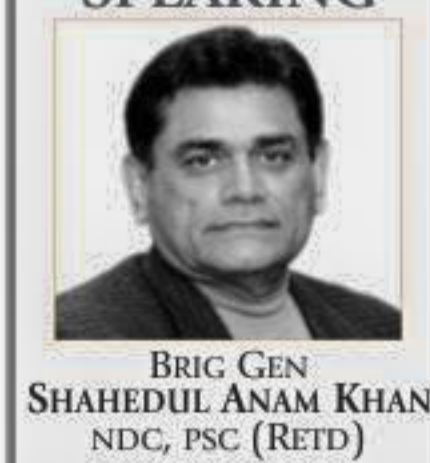
Over the last 25 years ours is a story of service to the Nation, to democracy, to economic development, to promoting excellence and ethical values.

It is in the sphere of public recognition for outstanding achievers in different sectors that *The Daily Star* can really be said to have made a significant difference. By awarding our talented students, successful entrepreneurs, creative artists, musicians and environmental campaigners we showcased our excellence and made our people acquire a new sense of self confidence.

For the last 16 years we have awarded

# "We turn not older every year but newer every day"

### STRATEGICALLY SPEAKING



BRIG GEN SHAHEDUL ANAM KHAN NDC, PSC (RETD)

THAT quote of Emily Dickenson applies equally aptly to an institution and even a newspaper as it does to a person. And that is the realisation I have been seized with since the preparations for celebrating the Silver Jubilee of *The*

*Daily Star* was conceived almost a year ago. And Emily Dickenson could not have been more prophetic when she uttered those words. Given the huge transmogrification of the print industry that commenced in the last decade, devising ways to appear with a newer look to the readers and in newer forms from time to time, has become the major preoccupation of the planners in newspapers; we are no exception.

Twenty-five years is a long count in a man's life, although it may not be so in a nation's or newspaper's life. But it is as good a time as any to introspect on the 25 years that we have left behind in order to set our compass for the next 25.

In the path that we have traversed since January 14, 1991, the paper had to face trials and suffer tribulations. We have faced trials to establish ourselves since our gestation coincided with the very resuscitation of democracy in the country after almost a decade and half of being in captivity. And the guiding principle, or the load star, so to say, was set by our late lamented founding Editor Mr. S M Ali and which merits repetition. He had said, "We will be anything but neutral in conflicts between good and evil, justice and injustice, right and wrong, regardless of position assumed. No one will be able to take this paper for granted, but no one will be given the cause to doubt our fairness."

In other words, a newspaper which deems the task of keeping the public informed as its most important duty, cannot afford not to be objective, since neutrality mandates one to equidistance oneself from the right and the wrong, from the truth and the falsehood. In the last 25 years, we have chosen to be closer to the right and the truth and the good. And to fulfil that objective we chose for ourselves the motto "Your Right to Know," which had placed on us an onerous

responsibility, since ensuring people's right implied the fulfilment of certain things on our part. Have we been able to fulfil them?

At the risk of appearing immodest, we can take justifiable pride in proving many sceptics of the newspaper wrong. For example, we feel we have been objective enough to prove those who think that a "newspaper isn't here to tell you what happened. It is here to tell you what it wants you to hear or what it thinks you want to hear," completely wrong. Both soft peddling and embellishing news has been anathema to us and will continue to be so.

And those who, like Mark Twain, think that, "If you don't read the newspaper, you're uninformed. If you read the newspaper, you're misinformed", have been proved wrong too. We feel truthfulness has been our forte and many international media agencies have at times fallen back on us to verify news carried by other agencies. And that speaks too about our reliability, and perhaps people like the late Christopher Hitchens, who, by his own admission, became a journalist because he did not want to rely on newspapers for information, would like to review their opinion. And we

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feel we have been able to prove even the most inveterate of sceptics like Oscar Wilde - who thought that, "By giving us the opinions of the uneducated, journalism keeps us in touch with the ignorance of the community" -- wrong. We have, we hope, not failed our readers in offering them insightful and scholarly opinions without making "the crazy crazier and ignorant more ignorant." We hope we have passed the trials in the judgment of our most valued readers.

However, our journey has not been without tribulations. Because living up to the motto with the subtext of 'Journalism without Fear or Favour' has not been without the attendant consequences, as in the process some sensitive toes were stepped upon, and we make no apologies for that.

But we can say with utmost satisfaction that we were in the right in fulfilling our duty since we have had to incur the wrath of the ruling party, irrespective of which party was in power, in equal measure. And we say this without feeling sorry about it, since to us it is more important to be for the people and the country than for any particular political party.

However, at the end of the day, it is the reader who is the best judge of our performance. He or she can say how well we have fared and whether we have been able to redeem ourselves. But whatever may be the verdict, we would like to feel, as we step in our 26th year, that we have not given anyone the cause to doubt our fairness.

The writer is Associate Editor, *The Daily Star*.