

# LIVING WITH THE EDITOR

ELITA KARIM  
PHOTOS: PRABIR DAS

For those who work for a newspaper or a news agency — we know how it feels to be surviving the office hours with an editor around. When you work on the same floor as the editor, and the walls are made of glass, life does get a little tricky. The first editor I had seen was on TV; Perry White, the editor of the Daily Planet in the movie Superman. Yet another editor I came across, and that too on television, was in Mr India, a Hindi film, where Annu Kapoor brilliantly portrayed Mr Gaitonde, a crazy editor of a newspaper, located in a depressing office room. While White would chew on his cigar, spit and speak at the same time, Mr Gaitonde would scream, smoke all the time and pull his hair in frustration.

Imagine my surprise when I came across Mr Mahfuz Anam, the editor of The Daily Star. Smoking and pulling his hair like Mr Gaitonde were obviously out of the question, but never have I seen Mr Anam even drink a cup of tea before or after 5 pm — To make matters worse, this editor did not have crazy hair and spoke in complete, coherent sentences. My dreams came crashing down. The romance was lost. I began to question my aspirations of becoming a journalist like Lois Lane. However, I did not give up and tried my best to act and look the part — chopping off my hair, wearing waist coats and lecturing people on anything and everything.

Frequent interactions with Mr Mahfuz Anam, however, changed me as a person and also helped me grow as a journalist. Conversations with him helped me perceive the profession differently. I realised that writing, editing and layout were 70 percent of being a journalist as opposed to jumping inside a burning building and rescuing children from a war stricken area — as shown on advertisements and films. I also realised that stories would come to you if you are calm, friendly and ask the right questions — politely but assertively. Clearly, The Daily Star has come this far thanks to Mr Anam's discipline, courage and the ability to enjoy. But one wonders, how is he as a father? Who is the real boss at home? Has the grandchild twisted him around in his little baby finger?

"I try my best to go home every day at 7:30 pm," says Mahfuz Anam, who stays back later than 7:30 pm on most days and has us staying back with him as well! "My grandson is in town and I don't want to miss the opportunity of giving him his daily bath before bed."

His wife Shaheen Anam and daughters Tahmima and Shaveena Anam are full of stories about him.

They begin by stressing his commitment to the family. "Back when we were in Bangkok and Mahfuz worked for the United Nations, we lived just 10



The women behind the man— Shaveena Anam, Shaheen Anam and Tahmima Anam.



Tahmima with her son Rumi.

minutes away from his office," says Shaheen Anam, Executive Director of Manusher Jonno Foundation. "Every day he would call before his lunch break and ask me to keep everything ready for little Shaveena's bath. Mahfuz would then come, take off his suit, fold his shirt sleeves and give Shaveena her daily bath. Then he would leave for work again. This actually became his routine for a while."

According to Shaveena, who is all grown up now and works at the Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center, Mahfuz Anam takes his family time very seriously. He likes to see the whole family together around the table at mealtimes, especially Fridays. "In fact, he takes his Friday lunches very seriously too," says his wife, Shaheen Anam. "Often we get family invitations for weekend lunches, but Mahfuz is usually not too keen on attending. He prefers to eat at home with family and loves it when I cook traditional deshi food — like bharta, fish and vegetables!"

The commitment goes beyond the everyday. His elder daughter, novelist Tahmima Anam, describes her father as a source of inspiration. "When he started The Daily Star, he followed his passion,

giving up a very secure UN job for the uncertainty of a newspaper—by doing this, he gave me the message that I could also follow my own path in life. That's why I became a writer." We all know how incredibly proud he is of his family. What is perhaps less known to us at the office is his extreme devotion to his wife. Tahmima says: "They are so in love — they go on trips together, they go on dates! Family, the country, the paper, are very important things to him, but his whole being revolves around Ammu."

Of course, family life always has its ups and down. Shaveena recalls the times when her father would 'interrogate' her and dig for reasons behind her frequent coughs and sneezes. "As a child I would catch a cold all the time," she says. "Abbu would be ready with questions— what did you do? Were you walking bare feet? Did you leave the fans on for too long? He was a firm believer that things don't just happen to you but you are the cause of your own luck and misfortune."

According to Shaveena, her dad is a regular dad, just like anyone else. "He gets irritated when we leave the lights and fans switched on in an empty room," she says. "Abbu loves to travel and read a lot.

He might be a little absentminded, — in the sense that he forgets what he was talking about a while ago. But he can recall the most minute details about historical events and figures or something that he had read somewhere years ago."

In a nutshell, Mahfuz Anam is a complete family man and loves food. "Abbu loves Thai food," adds Tahmima. "And has a real weakness for ice cream. He can never pass an ice cream shop without buying one."

The Anams love to spend time together. They spend evenings watching movies, sometimes even the slightly silly ones. I'm shocked to discover that our very serious editor likes action movies and that "Die Hard" is one of his favourites.

Coming to the newspaper, the women in the Anam household feel that they too are a part of the newspaper and vice versa, though they are all pursuing professions of their own. "The newspaper is like the fifth person in our family," adds Tahmima. "It has played a major role in all of our lives over the past 25 years. We've all grown up together."

Shaheen Anam goes back to the very first day of The Daily Star, when both Mahfuz Anam and she were present at the press, watching the first issue of the paper come to life. "I remember going to The Daily Star office," says Shaheen. "Back then, the paper layouts were done differently. There were papers all over the place — being cut and pasted on the table. I also remember finding some spelling mistakes!" She laughs. "And as the papers were coming out of the machines, I got so emotional. I held his hands and told him — your dream is coming out of that printing press."

And the dream comes true every year when The Daily Star celebrates success, courage, honesty and the ability to speak out boldly. ■

What do you think about journalism? Reporter collects information, interviews sources, sorts the information and then the final copy of the report is published for the readers. No... Duties of a journalist are not confined to only that; we do a lot more than you think. I believe most people do not know how the news reports they read everyday are prepared and made readable for them. As being a student of journalism, I had a little prior knowledge of these things. Working in the field, I found it to be a world much more complex than what I had imagined it to be.

Well, what have I learned here? At first we need to brain storm and decide on a story- about something that even readers don't know they want to know about. And that's the most tactful and innovative job of the journalist which needs approval from the news editor during meetings.

Once an idea is fixed, we need research the topic, visit the spot, sometimes attend the press conferences and ask questions, and interview the sources related to the topic by face to face meetings or in urgent cases, telephonic ones. But is that everything of the interview? No. If there is more than one party related to the report, the interview must include the voices and opinions of all. Furthermore, journalists need to crosscheck the information they got from the interviewees to maintain professional ethics. At the same time, we have to keep the record or proof of our work. To maintain a flow of information for further use, we also need to build professional relationships to the sources.

Meanwhile, we must follow a strict deadline. We need to prepare the report and hand over our first draft to the editor to check whether the format and angle are okay to move on with. While writing, we need to bear in mind that we have to follow some definite style guides of the paper. Also, we are expected to follow a tight word limit. I may have more than enough information which I cannot use in my allotted space, and make the information that is most needed my priority. If the editor thinks that the report is satisfactory, they will edit the grammatical mistakes, spellings, or sometimes few words if necessary. But if the editor thinks that we need more information, then we are supposed to



## THINGS I DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT JOURNALISM

NILIMA JAHAN  
PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

work on it again and complete the whole process.

One thing I must share is that, sometimes we take interviews of many people but we cannot use all of their opinions because of limited space or other issues; and in some cases, interviewees ask why we didn't publish their quotes

which can be hard to explain.

The last steps involve pasting and the formatting of the articles for print. We need to be very conscious about whether all the photographs and write ups are pasted in their allotted space or not. After that we need to proof read, check the panel of each story, date; in a word, every

single thing over and over again- at least thrice. And that's how a story goes to the reader through the press and distribution process.

Apart from all this, we need to make story lists, folders, and back-up articles and maintain them on a regular basis. Also, we have to manage our presence on social media, translate stories, and carry out other regular tasks and many more which are not visible to the readers.

In the whole process, we need to work with very good team spirit. Without teamwork and each others' support, it is impossible to even carry out our individual tasks.

While journalism or writing may seem as simple as writing your thoughts out, what makes it pleasantly and addictively difficult is picking which thought you want to voice, which thoughts to make a difference with, which thoughts will touch our readers' hearts with for that is what matters most to us. ■

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