

REMINISCENCE |

A TRANSITIONAL STINT

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ILLUSTRATION: MANAN MORSHED

On a bright winter day in February, I walked into the editor's room with a churn of emotions ranging from trepidation to butterflies in my stomach. As an aspiring journalist, I had for so long admired this person from a distance and now here I was to be interviewed by Mr S.M. Ali.

My life and my country were both on the precipice of a transition – while I was trying to switch jobs, my country was gearing up to embrace democracy once again after eight years of autocratic rule. For both, there was a promise of a bright future. The new English daily, *The Daily Star* had been launched with the aim of

Our job was to churn out features for the daily column of page 3, Dhaka-Day-by-Day and also contribute to the weekend section. With an amazing camaraderie between the colleagues, work turned out to be fun and we enjoyed every moment.

right now was our exhaustive coverage after a crack-down on a major red-light area in Narayanganj. We set off on a bus approached local journalists for a better foothold in the area and interviewed sex workers, the ultimate victims of this eviction. We visited their squalid living quarters, had lunch with them and realized how difficult their lives were. We met with one of the pimps and with the group of men who were trying to evict the sex workers. And everything was done in total secrecy from our families as it was unlikely that they would have allowed us to go had they known. The full-page coverage with credits to us was worth all the trouble.

S.M. Ali seemed to recognise the zeal in me and had a lot of hope for me to make a mark in mainstream reporting. He would in fact regularly give me professional tips so that I could get better. One very important tip that he had given and that comes to mind right now as I pen this is that, to avoid writing in the first person. He put it – “You are no one, so put aside the word ‘I’ and tell the story.” Ironically, that is exactly what I am doing today, while I write about him.

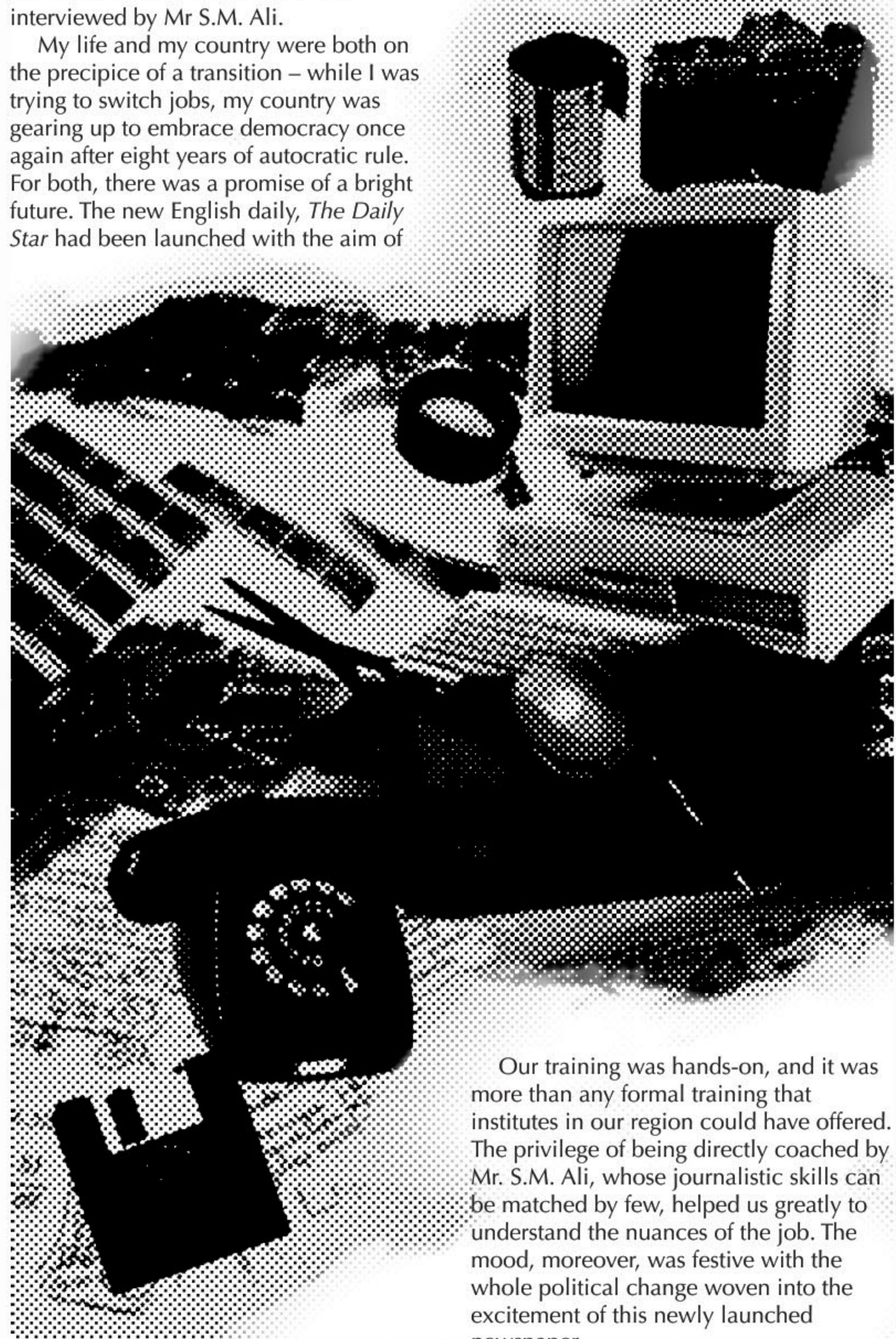
However, my editor's hopes about me could not materialise due to various social issues and professional hang-ups, but another avenue opened up for me. Soon

daily feature pages were introduced and I was made in-charge of the page dedicated to women's rights. I tried my best to do justice to my new role and also to those who had invested their faith in me. Our stories and relentless fight through them for women's rights did make a mark as none other. It was indeed a very satisfying role.

When we had begun working for The Daily Star, it was almost a struggle to write for the page 3 Dhaka Day-by-Day. It was like a weekly class test – never a respite – always struggling to think of a topic and then actually setting off to do the story. But despite all our endeavours we enjoyed and delivered at the end. The office initially was in the middle of an old commercial area. And we still found joy in racking our brains for a story topic amid sweltering heat in the old building with high-ceiling from which fans that dangled more for show than to provide any relief.

There came a time when I had to make a choice and take a decision and it came quite suddenly. I ended up choosing the difficult path, leaving behind my comfort zone. My tenure, like the old office, came to an abrupt end. But I cherish my memories of that momentous year and a half.

The writer is a producer for BBC Africa, a part of BBC World Service.



Our training was hands-on, and it was more than any formal training that institutes in our region could have offered. The privilege of being directly coached by Mr. S.M. Ali, whose journalistic skills can be matched by few, helped us greatly to understand the nuances of the job. The mood, moreover, was festive with the whole political change woven into the excitement of this newly launched newspaper.

We would begin the day in office by browsing through the newspapers, reading whatever caught our fancy, and then as the day progressed toward noon, begin our lunch, which continued till the day ended at around 6:30 pm.

In between, we – the feature writers, discussed issues – social and personal – with endless debates on how to tackle those hiccups in relationships. Once in a while did pull up our socks and put our heart and soul into a story.

One such incident that comes to mind

using the new-found press freedom for the good of the country. Undoubtedly, it was a dream for a young, up-and-coming journalist, brimming with ideas.

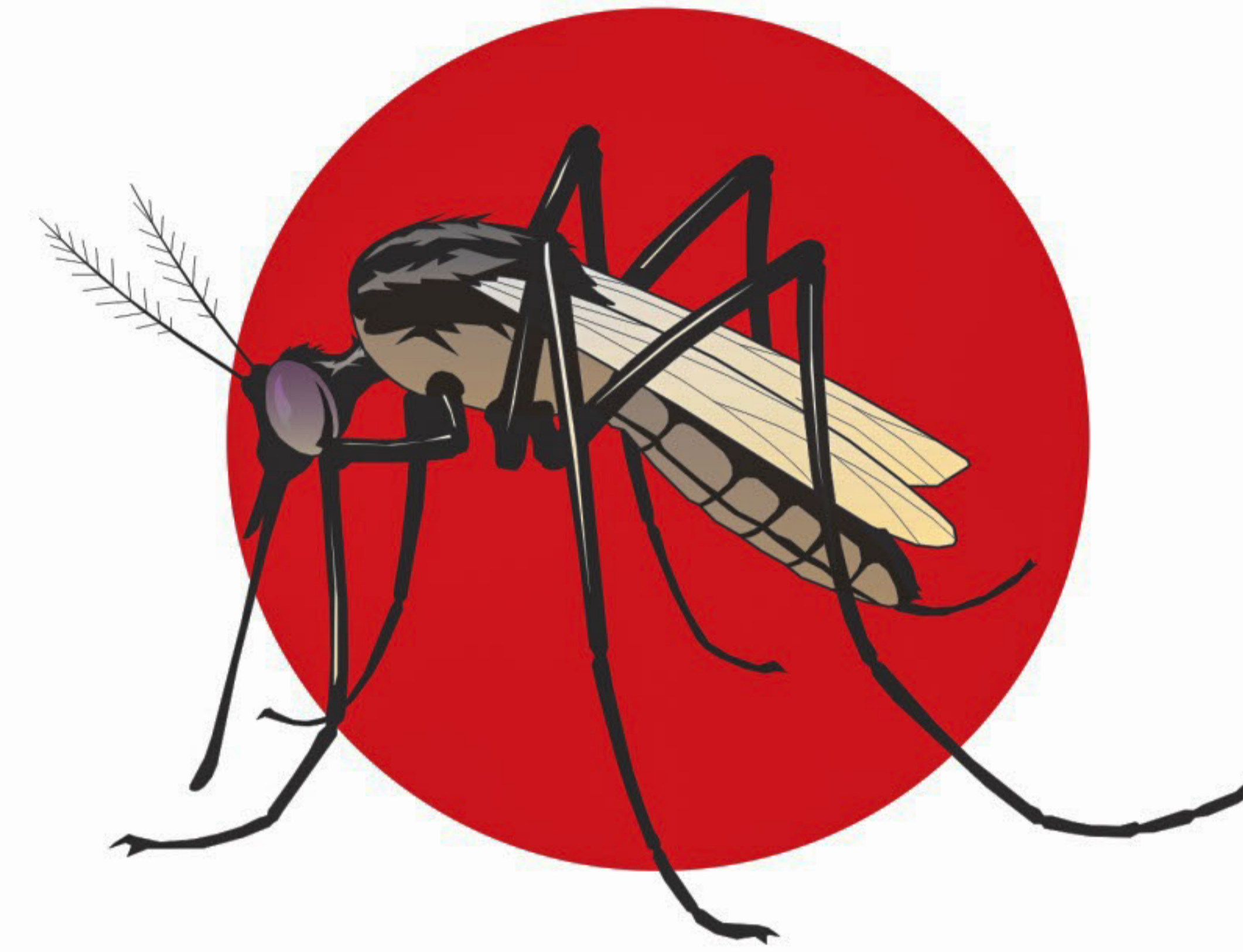
I was hired as a feature writer. So onward we marched, my country and I, into our respective new chapters. Riding high on the tide of transition, The Daily Star brought about a wave of change to the otherwise rigid and monotonous work culture prevalent in the existing dailies – be it English or Bengali.



The war has just begun and those championing the side of the good, according to the media, are failing. Minor battles and skirmishes are being won but the war is being lost. However, the matter at hand isn't a simple open and shut case of bombing the opposition into oblivion since that strategy has historically been known to be the worst strategy that can be applied. This war is a beast of an altogether different nature; it cannot be tamed and it cannot be discarded. It must be destroyed in such a way so as to never emerge again, unless of course it emerges in an altogether different place with an altogether different name despite having the same players and the same agenda. So what is this so-called great war all about?

The war in question really began four years ago. The Zika Mosquito Clan (ZMC) chapter of Brazil hadn't really taken root or weren't as visible. However, they were seen as an inevitable threat and steps needed to be taken before they grew in numbers. The United Pesticide Coalition had a plan in place. They would band together and infiltrate the ZMC by launching their own Genetically Modified Mosquitoes (GMMs). These Mosquitoes would not only be fully trained in armed and feeler to feeler combat but would also be made to fit the James Bond mould; sexy but scary. The first phase of the plan involved the GMMs getting cozy with the females of the ZMC and eventually impregnating them. The resulting offspring though would die along with the female due to the GMMs low sterility (but heavy machismo), resulting in a smaller pool of fanatic mosquitoes who firmly believe in the principles of Zika. However, things have not gone according to plan.

“We started operations 300 km away from where ZMC have taken root,” Commander Mosquito 1 of GMM stated. As the GMM began the most sexist war campaign in the history of the world,



WAR OF THE BLOOD-SUCKERS

defections began to take place and some fear this may have actually led to the sudden unstoppable spread of the Zikaideaology. “There is maybe a 5-15% chance of defection but the gains are higher. Doing nothing is worst; in 2009,

there were a bunch of Dengue militant mosquitoes in Key West, Florida and before they wreaked havoc, we wanted to send ground troops. We weren't allowed and so the result was 93 people being affected by the mosquitoes' anti-state

activities,” Commander Mosquito 1 said, drawing a parallel with that and 9/11, where authorities knew something was bound to happen but they did absolutely nothing. “Our genes mean the offspring will never be born and our level of sterility also means we won't survive either. This is basically killing off the next generation of militant fanatics in the most humane way without having to resort to Israel's pink-washing policy of child killing: “we had to shoot because the 11 year old Palestinian Hamas agent girl had a dangerous stone and some shizz”, he eloquently explained.

Another thorn in GMM's side is the Pro-Blood Sucking Mosquitoes Right's group. “This is a patriarchal mosquito war and we are blatantly sending the message that it is ok to seduce, have physical relations and then abandon the Brazilian Female Mosquitoes all because they are a little different from the rest of us and spread disease,” an incredulous activist ranted who was angered further when addressed by a gender pronoun. “This entire campaign reeks of sexism, racism, cultural appropriation and frankly plagiarism as it completely mimics the technique of the great Jeffery Amherst, Britain's Commander in chief in North America who popularized the act of using smallpox to wipe out Native Americans,” ‘we’ concluded. The GMM's have also faced further criticism from the millions who hate anything genetically modified, especially, and no surprise, the Russians. The developing world has also accused the world powers of using this as an excuse to force the abortion issue in countries where it is yet not socially acceptable.

When the dust has settled in the battlefield, only then can we know who the victor was and who wasn't. GMMs only success so far have been documented by a suspicious report on their progress in the Cayman Island while some say there has been a 90% success rate in Brazil too. However, asking mosquitoes to fight other mosquitoes is almost like asking militants to fight other militants. Oh wait. Been there, done that too. But before the verdict is outthough, don't let any mosquito suck your blood, take no sides, use your common sense and consult your doctor and not your news stations.

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NUMBERS |

34.88

The amount of seconds Mahfuza Khanam Shila, a Bangladeshi swimmer took to clinch her 2nd gold medal in the Women's 50-metre Breast Stroke of the 12th South Asian Games at the Dr Zakir Hussain Aquatic Complex in Guwahati, India. It took her 34.88 seconds to set the fastest swimmer record breaking the previous record of 34.97 seconds set by Sri Lankan swimmer Mayumi Raheem in 2006 SA Games in Colombo.