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People purchase print newspapers to understand the context behind and the analysis of the news. So, I believe that the future of print media in a local language still has a promising future. We are taking every step to increase our circulation, to reach more people.

We now publish 11 editions of *Prothom Alo* from three cities of Bangladesh (Dhaka, Chittagong and Bogra) to distribute the newspaper early in the morning to readers who live in all parts of the country and are from all walks of life.

However, to increase our revenue, we are trying to diversify our content. *Prothom Alo* has launched magazines for young readers, publishing supplements on different themes to reach maximum readers. We have launched a publishing house which has already published more than 500 titles. We organise competitions and events. We employ content marketing strategies.

In many countries, newspaper houses have been running other profit-making ventures like a digital business, e-business, money transfer, group tour, etc to finance the media house. I don't think these ventures can hamper journalism. If you sell some of your content by honest means and publish it in a way that your readers can distinguish it from other content, I don't think it compromises journalistic ethics. If you can diversify your source of revenues, it is not necessary to increase your advertisements.

When newspapers are so dependent on advertisements for revenue, how can they ensure that they are not biased towards their wealthy financiers?

As I said, newspapers have always been dependent on advertisements for revenue. However, whether the newspapers will be

biased towards its financiers or not will depend on its editorial and operational policy.

Newspapers should run on their own income. They should have a strict policy regarding receiving advertisements. We started working with our mother company Transcom Limited with the condition that our newspaper will run on its own income. Despite various pressures, we were progressing steadily with this motto. But in 2016, nearly 50 big companies stopped giving advertisements in our newspaper. Several of these companies have reserved their embargo on us till now. For the last three years, no mobile company has given any ad in *Prothom Alo*. At present *Prothom Alo* receives very few government ads and supplements. On the other side, we never asked for advertisements to some big companies to maintain our ethical stance. In this way, we have enjoyed a sense of freedom and have never been fully dependent on corporate houses.

Under several repressive press laws, do you think newspapers in Bangladesh can publish what they should publish?

Problems related to printing etc. continue to prevail. But facing all these odds, newspapers in Bangladesh are working with courage. But it is an undeniable fact that we cannot write everything, nor can we say all of what we should. We cannot practice free speech and freedom of expression without fear of reprisals. We expected a freer and much more democratic environment as guaranteed by our constitution.

The government has enacted several laws such as the ICT (Amendment) Act, 2013, and the Digital Security Act, 2018 that pose a serious threat to journalism. Several journalists have already been

suppressed using these laws. More than 50 cases have been filed against me. Mahfuz Anam, editor of *The Daily Star*, has been dealing with more than 80 cases filed against him in different parts of the country. These cases are still under trial in court.

Journalists around the world have been facing similar obstacles. In the United States, where freedom of expression has been guaranteed by the first amendment of the constitution, the president is pressuring newspapers such as *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* from the White House. You will find similar incidents in India and many countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. However, newspapers and journalists are still thriving amidst these threats. This is the beauty of journalism. Working and flourishing in this adverse situation is a good experience too.

Some media houses publish news/reports sometimes just to build or hold audiences, for instance, to strengthen their presence on social media or even to serve majoritarian politics. What do you think of this trend?

You will always find some media houses that act as the spokesperson of some political parties or corporate houses. But these newspapers can never grow substantially. People can trace their bias and will start to avoid them.

You will also find the alternative stream—media houses for whom there is no alternative to unbiased journalism. We have proved that preserving good, independent journalism can also be a good business. Predisposed journalism can never grow and sustain.

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Now, as this brilliant team heartbreakingly puts the last issue to bed, the realities of financial constraints are hitting us in the face. To them I can only say, congratulations for persevering despite all the odds, for speaking truth to power and giving your best selves to this weekly.

As they say, all good things must come to an end but before we say our final goodbyes, let us not forget the indescribable satisfaction all of us who have been part of this publication have derived in bringing out, week after week, a labour of our love. Those who say the days of magazine journalism are over—to them I will say, hold on to your death sentence a little longer. Our readers whom we have unwittingly let down will still be around long after the dust settles, craving for the long form, the feature, the personal column, the travelogue, the in-depth analysis, the cartoon that says it all, the satirical essay, the eclectic photography, and the enlightening interview. This is what gives me the belief that magazine journalism in this country will find its way back—maybe in print, maybe in broad sheet, or maybe online as has been the case of many magazines all over the world. So, while the sun sets on Star Weekend, it will rise again in some other avatar, in some other place—of that I am sure.

Until then, dear readers, adieu.

Aasha Mehreen Amin was the first editor of Star Weekend magazine, serving in the post for the most part of 18 years. She is currently deputy editor of the Op-Ed and Editorial pages of The Daily Star.

