



ABIDA RAHMAN CHOWDHURY

The soft light of the setting sun illuminates the entire section every time I walk in, mostly because I AM ALWAYS LATE. On one side white balloons hang, on another side a dart board. There is a coffee corner too, which was introduced by the editor because she “needed” to buy something as she waited in front of a store. The coffee machine served us well for a solid week before breaking down. It was a good week. We invited anyone who would dare walk these alleys to have coffee with us!

The *Star Weekend* team has had many such phases. There was the winter *pitha* phase, the pizza phase, the egg roll phase. Then there were the routine Tuesday night breakdowns trying to come up with titles and totally going off on tangents, sometimes ranging from grossly insensitive to just wholesome funny. I could possibly write a novel on all the colleagues (ahem FRIENDS) I have made here. There is Sushmita S Preetha, forever in a hurry. In a hurry to sign off the issue, in a hurry to edit, but always meticulously accurate. Baffles me. There is Kazi Tahsin Agaz Apurbo, moderately angry, walking as though in a race and pushing through beautiful visuals. Just beside him sits Sarah Bari, the first recipient of the glaring sun, always reading anything and everything and also a “cutting machine.” She sub-edits, in case that was not clear. The remaining four, Maliha Khan, Shahnawaz Khan Chandan, Nilima Jahan, and Zyma Islam. The former two are the serious ones, always matter-of-fact. In fact, Maliha is the one who said that for her parting words she would write nothing at all. Meanwhile Chandan, well, he just puts his headphones on and powers through the evening as we throw a racket around him.

Zyma Islam boycotts everything, writes the best (imo) investigative pieces, and also looks at cat memes. Lastly my cubicle mate, Nilima Jahan. She is emotional, fierce, and funny and is subjected to cat memes all day long, thanks to yours truly. There was one other person though, Naimul Karim Elin, the one that got away. He left us to do more “world exclusives” and took along with him any semblance of calm we had.

Oh! Also, no goodbye piece would be complete without a shout-out to Aanila Kishwar, regular visitor, break-partner, Kowalski analyst and much, much more (no place to add more words) and to our neighbouring section of *Shift*, *Next Step*, and *Bytes*—aka the mostly “Brodeude section.” There is Shaer Reaz, listening in on our conversations and piping in with random anecdotes. And there is Ronny bhai, resident dad-joke maker and funny man. We always forget to inform them that there’s food.

I am not known to summarise my writing and I sure cannot summarise this year and a half of stories, reporting, intense debates ranging from topics of human trafficking to commodification of rickshaw art. No, I cannot. So, I simply took the liberty to write a line or two on these people and this section which moonlighted as part-time home for a good year or more.

SARAH ANJUM BARI

My colleague Abida wrote of the “soft light of the setting sun” illuminating the rest of the *Star Weekend* section. Let me clarify: it’s anything but soft. The angry fireball glares straight into my eyes for the entire workday until I have a throbbing headache. It’s why, on any given day, you’ll find me slashing through a 5,000-word feature on my desk while casually donning a pair of very dark sunglasses—indoors—or doing the same canopied under a giant umbrella propped behind my PC, stolen from our neighbours in *Shift*. The umbrella occasionally sends a flower vase crashing to the floor, water everywhere. There’s noise, scampering, mopping of floors, taking of pictures, some dancing around. But we write and sub-edit on.

Such was life at *Star Weekend*. If ever a newsroom was TV sitcom-material, it was this sun-drenched, colour-in-riot back end of the seventh floor of *The Daily Star*. There was always tension in the air. Here a story is being added to and typed up by Zyma or Chandan, awaiting the green light through what our magazine editor calls the “will-we-get-arrested” test. Nilima has already handed hers in way ahead of time, having gone undercover to reveal a pyramid scheme or domestic abuse or the plights of rickshaw pullers. Beside me, Apurbo hunches in concentration—over his sketchpad or the computer—as he gives colour and shape and a certain edge to the stories we’ve spent the past week penning. Occasionally, he snickers at a Facebook post or dancing celebrities online, mutters to himself aloud, asks me which version of an illustration-in-progress I like better.

From a distance, you can hear Abida roaring in laughter as she returns from having done the corrections with graphics downstairs; she’s carrying coffee that she will sip while she finishes writing up her story. It will make you care just a little bit more about the environment and its animals. Meanwhile our editor Preetha prances and hops from desk to desk, cooing a “Hey boo,” and hollering “Well, well, well,” in a voice that cracks like a whip through all the commotion. She manages to retain some sanity as we sludge past, way past our deadlines and bedtimes. But there’s no noise from Maliha. She’s quietly everywhere, reporting on refugee crises, editing articles, doing corrections, standardising our style guide, completely abreast on celebrity gossip the world over.

Writing, listening, laughing, eating, thinking amidst these characters for the past one year has been an invaluable education in balancing work and fun, in drowning out noise to just write, write, write until I’ve put down on paper how I truly feel about a book, a movie, an art exhibition. I then ram those words through the straightjacket of a word limit. It breaks my heart but on Friday, reading them afresh on print, I am grateful for these constraints.

*Star Weekend* has given me over a year of earning a living from discussing art that I loved and art that I hated, art that I discovered and learned from along the way. It has helped me find what are allegedly my secret super powers (shortening an article length and increasing its “poetixxx”) and my super weaknesses (not revealing them in print). Literature is what I cherish more than anything else, the one form of magic I believe we interact with every day in this physical world. Every other Friday, being told by someone that the way I wrote about a book made them want to pick it up, made them think for just a little while about the power in the choreography of words—it was transformative.

But it wasn’t just a one-way street. From my team and readers, I’ve internalised a steady commitment to personal beliefs and opinions, to passion for one’s own beat. In return, I’ve (hopefully) taught them that the best way to end a stressful workday—before you’ve even left the office—is to watch some good ol’ *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun*. I think my job here is done.