

MY CAREER IN NEWS AGENCY JOURNALISM: ENTRY & EXIT

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It was early February 1972, nearly two months after our independence, that I got a phone call from the then BSS chief reporter Karim Bhai (Jawadul Karim, who left us only a few months ago). I was in (now defunct) Morning News at 1, DIT Avenue which ceased to appear in uncertain post-liberation situation and was sitting almost idle without knowing what to do next. This was the paper where I began my career as a reporter in late 1967. There were often indications that the government might appoint an administrator to rerun MN, but nothing substantive.

"Tahaboor, what are you doing?" Karim Bhai asked me and I replied "nothing as such." Then he asked me whether I would like to work for BSS news agency. It was a pleasant and welcome surprise for me at that time, but I admitted to Karim Bhai that I have no experience in news agency journalism. And next he asked me to come to BSS office immediately. On arrival, Karim Bhai took me to Faiz Bhai's corner room, where I also met Baby Bhai (late Syed Mahbub Alam Chowdhury) and also Hasan Bhai (Hasanuzzaman Khan who also left MN at that time and joined BSS). I was received very affectionately and was asked to join as a senior staff reporter in BSS. I formally joined BSS on 16th of February 1972. That was a great day and definitely turning point in my 36-year career as a professional journalist.

Time passed quickly in BSS where I worked in various positions, mainly in reporting side. I tried to dedicate myself and felt very homely with every body in BSS. I was given the responsibility of Chief Reporter, Diplomatic Correspondent and Special Correspondent and covered for BSS many major national and international events at home and abroad. I was also posted as BSS Correspondent in New Delhi in January 1984, which again for me was a turning point of my career. I will come back to it later.

In January 1977, I was working in my room at BSS when the then Chief Editor and Managing Director Aman Bhai (Mr. Amanullah) called me in his room and introduced to a foreign journalist, Micheal Garin, AFP's regional director in New Delhi who was on a visit to Dhaka at that time. After pleasantries, Garin said that Mr. Amanullah had already mentioned to him my name as a hardworking

agency reporter and he asked me straightway if I could work part-time for AFP as its Dhaka Stringer. Again it was a pleasant surprise for me, but I wanted to know what is going to happen to Mr. AZM Haider who was working for AFP in Dhaka. He said AFP had reached a settlement with him and now looking for someone with news agency background to work for AFP in Dhaka. He said if I don't accept the offer, they will look for someone else. He said Mr. Haider's term will end on 31st January and therefore if I agree I will have to work as AFP stringer from 1st February, 1977. This is how I got involved for the first time with an international news agency as a part-time correspondent (stringer).

Later, I met Mr. Haider who confirmed that he will cease to work for AFP from February. As per Garin's advice I began to send sample news reports and features to him every week and he used to send back feedbacks. I was told how to focus a copy for international wire service incorporating needed background for AFP's varied clients worldwide, many of whom may not have much or clear idea about Bangladesh. Lastly, everything went fine until I started formally transmitting reports, mostly through public telex.

Things moved smoothly for years until late 1984 when I was posted by BSS in New Delhi. I immediately informed AFP in Delhi that since I will be away from Dhaka on BSS assignment for a few years, they should find a new AFP stringer for Bangladesh. What happened next was beyond my comprehension. One day I got a phone call from AFP director in Delhi who wanted to know the tenure of my BSS posting out of Dhaka. I told him normally, it would be three to four years. And he told me that since I will be away from Dhaka for few years only, AFP would like to retain my position in Dhaka until I return from Delhi. As such he asked me to find someone who would agree to work for AFP in Dhaka during my absence and would be ready to step aside on my return. He did not explain to me but I could imagine the confidence and trust they in AFP had on me and in my performance. I was appalled at their gesture. Anyway, I talked to my young colleague in BSS at that time-Md. Roushanuzzaman-who readily agreed to string for AFP in my absence.

While my posting in Delhi was under process and taking a bit long time, news came on assassination of Indian PM Indira Gandhi. There was none from BSS in Delhi since my colleague Zaglul Ahmed Chowdhury returned long ago at the end of his successful and well-exposed tenure in New Delhi. Files moved very fast and I arrived in New Delhi in the first week of January 1985.

But a new problem arose within first few months of my stay in Delhi where I used to operate from PTI office. AFP bureau was also located in same building. One day, AFP Bureau chief, at that time J. F. Leven, phoned me to inform that AFP has decided to open its first office/bureau in Dhaka before end of 1985 and the management had asked him to contact me whether I will be able to return to Dhaka immediately to work for AFP as Bureau Chief. I told him instantly that I

thought it was a very good offer for me, I am not in a position to join AFP leaving BSS at that stage. I explained that my national news agency had invested lot of money for my posting in Delhi and it will not be proper for me to resign from BSS and return to Dhaka so soon. I told him to look for some one else in Dhaka if they were in hurry. The matter ended there and he seemed a bit unhappy with the outcome of our talks.

I almost forgot the matter when a week after I got a call again. He informed that after he discussed my difficulties, AFP head office decided to postpone the Dhaka plan for a year and asked him to contact me again. He explained that a lot of developments are taking place in Bangladesh and AFP was serious about early implementation of its Dhaka office plan. Without consulting anyone I told him that I can consider their offer, but not before completing at least two years as BSS correspondent in Delhi. And on condition that BSS agrees to accept my resignation. The pressure continued until middle of 1986 when AFP became more serious about its plan in view of floods, cyclones and other unfolding news events, including prospect of holding SAARC summit in Bangladesh. Leven said AFP is not in a position to defer the plan indefinitely and requested me to consider it more seriously.

I was under serious mental pressure what to do. One day I decided to talk to then BSS chief Musa Bhai (ABM Musa) for his advice. I was grateful to him for his understanding of my problem. He told me that if I decide to accept AFP offer, he will not hold me back in BSS. Things moved smoothly since then and I sent my resignation letter to BSS and returned to Dhaka in October 1986, exactly after 20 months.

Next day on my arrival I resumed my new responsibility in AFP and within almost a month able to find a space at BSB building for planned AFP Bureau office.

Nearly 18 years passed since my taking over as AFP's first Bureau Chief in Dhaka. During this period there were ups and down, but at the end of the day, AFP came out as the most fast expanding international news agency in Dhaka, both in terms of news/photo coverage on Bangladesh and on commercial operation.

In late 2002, I planned to retire from active journalism and conveyed my decision to AFP next year. The idea was to try something else lighter, if needed for survival. After a few months AFP agreed to accept my early retirement and asked me when would I like to retire. I told them that my next birth day falls on 23rd January 2004 and I wish that should be my last day in AFP. So on that day curtain fell on my 32-year career in news agency journalism, representing both national and international.

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