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Media murk

June 27, 2012



We have just been experiencing an influx of new channels. Starting from BNP-Jamaat coalition, which had awarded licenses based on political considerations, down to the current times, the tragic saga of the media scene in Bangladesh has continued. The Rich have raced to the top and have discovered their cheese, also known as “media”. Therefore, with regard to the ownership, political and economic considerations have outweighed any other factor that ought to have been taken into account before having been awarded the golden paper labelled as “license”.

Apparently, in most of the well-reputed schools, a child’s admission depends on how well the interview goes with the parents. The parents need to secure minimum score or else, admission is denied, in spite of how brilliant the little one may appear to be. Yet, in the most sensitive and responsible sector of media ownership, licenses seemed to have been an easy lollipop to soothe the politicians’ greed for more control. A couple of channels keep on changing their leanings, as per the winds of the time; a couple of channels stick to their individual agenda to tow lines best suited to corporate interests; and a couple just appear neutral, yet have a deep seated partisan line to pursue.



Photo: bdnews24.com

Sadly enough, the thin line between the public and the private has been badly dented because of greed. Media, the “Fourth Estate”, a coinage by Edmund Burke and later popularised by Thomas Carlyle, breathes power into the minds of the public. After the “medieval estates of the realm” consisting of the mid 19th century tiers of the clergy, nobility and the commoners, the term “Fourth Estate” was generally meant for the public press. Today, the public realm of press is almost non-existent. We tend to dismiss anything bearing the label of “public”, automatically questioning the content, intent and the depth of the propaganda. Therefore the private media has become the fifth tenet of faith for us, the people.

Yes, the private media is strictly governed by economics. What isn’t today? When the public has ceased, why shouldn’t the private look after its own interest? And why should the private not be in competition with the other? Think about Jeffrey Archer’s chilling account of two media barons in his 1996 book, “The Fourth Estate” where a Richard

Armstrong and Keith Townsend are locked in a fierce battle, trying to take over the entire European media range. In reality, the two figures were based on Robert Maxwell and Rupert Murdoch, who eventually won control over their territory. Maxwell controlled the Daily Mirror along with its Sunday Mirror and Murdoch settled for The Sun, The Times and News of the World. So, in brief, the battle between corporate interests always persists in media. That's natural. That's accepted. In the highly privatised world, greed is even looked upon as a tool of universal good as without capital, nothing much can be done as welfare depends on material considerations.

Like it or not, the electronic media has taken over our lives. What we read in print is usually seen the night before, except for a few sites that give us updates on a regular basis. Admit it: electronic is enticing. It captures your attention; pulls your strings and eventually creates the first impression that sets into or exits your perception through a print/web endorsement. However, what we watch is not always what we tend to build our ideas on. We wait to read as well.



Photo: bdnews24.com

And what we have read so far and what we have seen so far have both been painful. A private channel had aired an unedited version of a media owner calling the prime minister "bachal", along with sharing his imagined version of the Sagar-Runi murder scene, almost in a prophetic manner. Where on earth can he expect to seek a safe exit to, now? The journalists' scuffle was almost like going through a graphic novella, blended with a bit of fact and a dash of fiction. The scene of the two abusive sides smelt of pure disaster. But then again, don't we always repeat and repackage violence in one form or the other? And don't we always forget what was taught to us by history? Isn't it a world where nothing is new except that which has been forgotten and that lessons learnt in the past are newly packaged with fresher mistakes and hence no dictum holds ground anymore and no lesson is ever learnt from the past?

Today, in Bangladesh, there's news by the hour; breaking news thumps our cell phones; morning news gives us a wake-up wrap of what's happening around the world and of course, television channels along with other new media tools pop up as tags on most of our social networking platforms. Therefore, in a news dependent situation like this, all we need is individual professional integrity from the journalists so that we can continue to have the faith we have in them.

So, if one media house breeds competition, and if the other retaliates with equal ferocity, there's no harm in there. But if the scene turns into one like Sunday evening, then the audience has every reason to be unnerved. On Sunday, we watched a scuffle; on Monday, we watched a media owner being declared "unwanted" and on Monday evening, a competing channel had aired the unedited footage of the same owner rambling away. There's nothing more disappointing than watching media houses fighting against the other with unsurpassed bitterness and wrath. There's nothing more hurtful than watching familiar faces engaged in collar grabbing and cursing.

Media world is also like a maze, where the competitors are all groping for their portion of cheese, which just keeps on diminishing and moving. There are just too many players in one absurd media maze to steer through and what we witness on screen does not always correspond to reality most of the time. After all, there are multiple editing sessions which fine tune the truth and what we watch is often a shadow of what we ought to see. Let's also remind ourselves, that after a certain time, repetition and repackaging begin to sink in. What is not the whole truth becomes "hyper reality", simulating the original, and on the other hand, it creates a parallel platform of an alternative truth, which justifies itself at the end, in the form of an unmelodious refrain. And that is what we remember and that is what is recorded as history. Therefore, for the sake of the regular viewers and readers, and in order for real events not to breed murky shadows, the media community needs to internalise propriety, and adjust their lenses accordingly, defying undue market pressures and organisational requirements.

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Boby on July 1, 2012 at 3:13 pm

A great article. Thanks Rubana for your serious home work.

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Akramul Hoque Suman on June 29, 2012 at 3:05 pm

Great!

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Nadeem Qadir on June 28, 2012 at 7:19 pm

Like it. Thanks Rubana!

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Golam Arshad on June 28, 2012 at 5:52 pm

Rubana: Good Job!!

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Zaid on June 27, 2012 at 10:57 pm

A maze it is!

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Golam Arshad on June 27, 2012 at 10:51 pm

Rubana: Brilliant piece! I define the World of Media as the shade the shadow fears! We may rumble and fumble, yet we are the fodder to a scary blurry vision the Mighty Fiefdom of Instant jolting MEDIA! Thank you for your insight!

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