

# YEP TALK

The Young Entrepreneurs &amp; Professionals page

## The YEP Forum Public Dialogue on Expectations from Our Tele Media

Organised by The young Entrepreneurs and The Professionals Forum in Collaboration with

The Daily Star and The British Council

**Osama Taseer:** In my capacity as the coordinator of the Youth Forum I thank you all for sparing the time for the young people. I think all of us will be benefited from this dialogue.

This Youth Forum was con-



stituted with active cooperation and support from The Daily Star.

Youth Forum is essentially a forum of the young between the age group of 25 and 35 years. It is forum for the young professionals and entrepreneurs who have acquired the professional skills and want to contribute to nation-building. We want our young to be heard by the policy makers and we want them to be integrated with the development of Bangladesh.

**Rafi Hossain:** We are very upset over the situation at Bangladesh Television. Will this situation continue?

Viewers of BTV from different sectors have gathered here at the dialogue to discuss where this situation is leading us. As viewers, can we put pressure on the BTV which is run totally on taxpayers' money? Today's dialogue is aimed at finding out an effective way to put pressure on the BTV authorities.

**Aly Zaker:** My question is, are we talking about Bangladesh Television or we are also talking about other channels available to us? Because everyday, the channels available in Bangladesh is increasing like wild fire. I have research reports which show that what used to be nationally 11 per cent of the TV-owning households hooked on to channel television, has now increased to 18 per cent nationally. In the Dhaka City, roughly about 78 per cent TV-owning households are hooked to international channels.

Keeping this in mind, I guess, our discussion has to focus on each one of these.

**Rafi Hossain:** BTV is our target, definitely. As we have Ekushey and others here, we would like to hear from them too.

**Farah Kabir:** We can start with one or two issues.

**Rafi Hossain:** Will we go on watching what they are showing. We, as viewers, have a say and for that The Daily Star has provided us a platform.

**Mohammad Jahangir:** My deliberation will be very short about our expectations from our tele-media, with focus on Bangladesh Television. Although we have only two other channels, ATN which is already in service and ETV which is yet to start, both private concerns, it is very hard to say what we will get from the private sector. And as ETV is yet to start, there



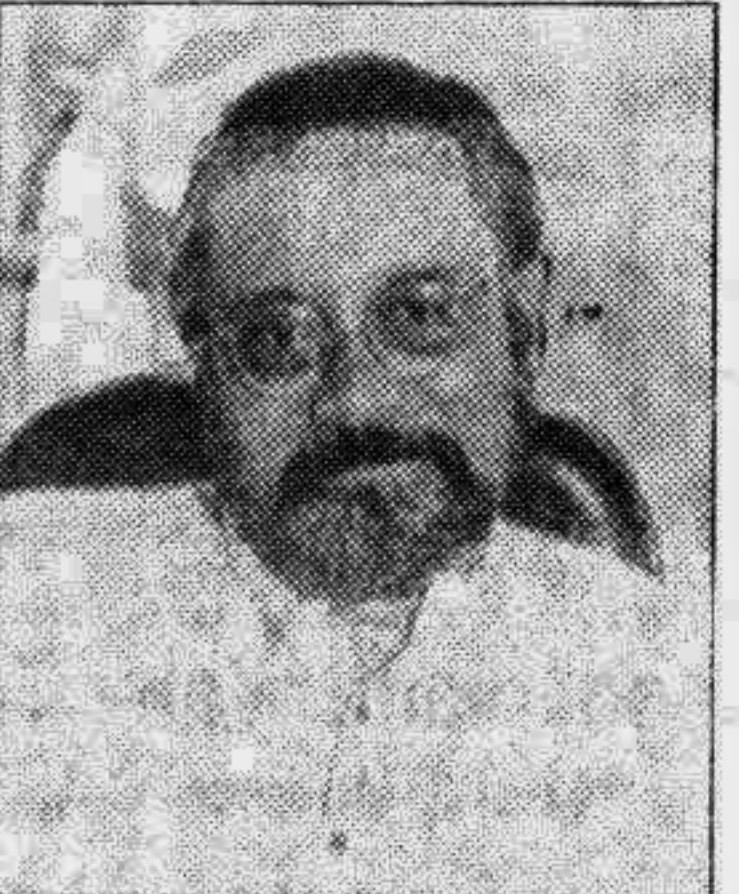
is very little to talk on it. So let us all decide that we keep our discussion limited to BTV.

For a long time I have personally observed BTV very closely and tried to write a little on it. And I can say that I feel frustrated now. So, I personally don't have any expectations from the present structure of Bangladesh Television. I feel that the demand from different progressive quarters for the last one decade for providing autonomy to the Bangladesh Television has unfortunately withered away during the present regime. It should be our united effort from our respective positions to create pressure for freeing the BTV from government control and providing autonomy. Our expectations to a large extent are reflected in the report of the Commission on Autonomy. Even if there is any weakness, it can be discussed. We have heard that the government's Information Ministry has formed a committee which is now examining the report of the Commission. We will wait to get the report of the examining committee, but we should

continue the pressure, be active, be on the streets and raise voices from our respective forums that government control on media is contrary to democracy. We should forcefully say this. The way we became active against the hindrance on our package programme, although it was for a little while, but I have not seen our artists community active like that in the last three years for the autonomy of Bangladesh Television. I can only appeal to become active in that regard. We can express our ideas only if a new management comes. I am personally not in favour of saying anything more to the present management of the BTV and to the Information Ministry because I am not at all interested in the present management of the BTV and I don't have any expectations from them.

**Aly Zaker:** I can just add that privatisation is the only answer to having a free media whether it is newspaper, television or radio. I don't think there is any other way of having a media which is free from encumbrances of the government, whichever one is in power at that point in time.

Everybody knows that there is a little confusion over the autonomy of Bangladesh Television. And the confusion is this that after the BTV is provided autonomy and Bangladesh Television becomes Bangladesh



Television Corporation. A Chairman is appointed from the government who is the authority. If we look at PIA or PTV, there is a chairman and a board of directors, they work under the direction of the government although they might be more free than they are now.

Another very dangerous thing is that the third and fourth class employees of the BTV have said that they believe in the autonomy of the screen but not in the autonomy of the service and our service should remain as government service.

The benefits of government jobs is just signing the attendance register and doing other things including participating in private programmes. We, who do private programmes, know that we have to get the resources from the BTV. This is a benefit of government jobs but this opportunity will not be there if there is autonomy and that is what they don't want. I don't know whether it has ever been mentioned that the autonomy of the screen cannot be successful without the autonomy of the service.

If I am a government employee, besides being corrupt, I will be in total control of the government. So, if the government provides autonomous screen but says that you cannot say these things as a government employee otherwise you lose your government job, then there will be a contradiction. We have to think how to come out of this contradiction. If we cannot implement total autonomy there is problem for Bangladesh Television. I don't think Bangladesh Television can emerge as an independent television if such contradictions remain.

**Rafi Hossain:** What role can we play here?

**Saleem al Deen:** I am personally attached with Bangladesh Television since 1968. My dramas were screened on the television since I was a second year student of the Dhaka University. I don't feel that my relations with the television have, so far, been very happy. Not at all. It was different when there was autonomy but its face, behaviour changed after it went under the government. I don't think I have been inside BTV in the last three or four years.

If we want to be relieved from the present situation, the government should open another channel with a structure and organization like the British Broadcasting Corporation. Something can be expected only then. I think the present day Bangladesh Television has rotted.

In India everything is privatised. Although DD in India is government owned, the control is not that rigid and the prime minister's speech or a minister's speech is not frequently

broadcast. The government control is not like that. We can follow that example.

The existing Bangladesh Television is so rotten that for technology or scientific development they are not going to bring good films from outside. They are purchasing and running English package programmes from outside which does not develop us socially or mentally. What are these programmes like Adventures of Robin Hood contributing to the society?

There is no social commitment. We don't see any programme relating to the tribes of our country. We have 19 or 20 tribes whose culture is different, their socio-economic programmes are different. We don't get to see them. The only job of BTV is to broadcast some of the government propaganda, government messages.

It has become the character of the Bangladesh Television that it will continue to lose its talents. We have seen when we were young that there were many talented producers in the BTV who had done many creative things. I am not undermining the present ones. When the Television was a corporation these producers have worked day and night to build it up. Even after the war of liberation we have found them to produce some fantastic programmes. I have tried many of my stage experiments on the television. I am indebted to television for this period. I have been writing for the last 27 or 28 years and written so many dramas but during these long years the Television had not telecast any of my dramas except one, they never thought of it worth re-televasting, maybe because I did not fulfil anybody's expectation, maybe because I did not salute as much as needed. Or maybe I have been abandoned on the excuse that my dramas cannot be easily perceived. And when we attempt to re-telecast my dramas on Bangladesh Television problems like that of package programmes come up. I don't say that all the package programmes are artistic but it has created new ideas and new expectations among many of us. It has also financially benefited many of us. We are anxious at the stoppage of package programme.

Now my question is, will this discussion here have any impact on the government?

During our demonstrations during the caretaker government and even during the Ershad government, we thought we had gained freedom. Although we had gained freedom morally, the invisible demon has remained. Like the myth of Sisyphus we will just go on picking up the stones and it will continue to keep falling.

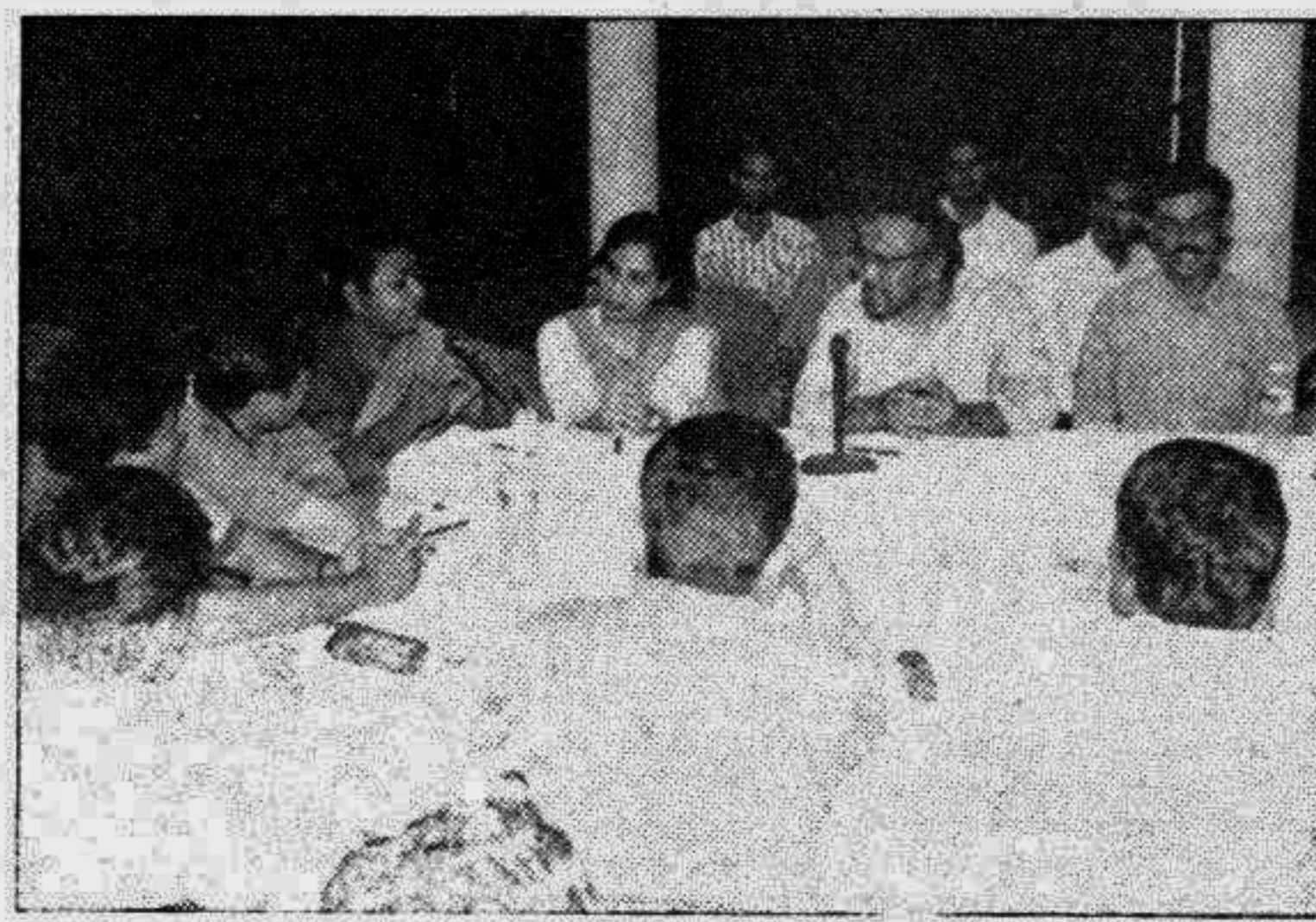
I have two concrete proposals. If the government is sincere with Television it should open up a second channel which will be completely corporation-based. If they want to keep the



existing one, let them keep it. They don't need to give autonomy to the present one and I don't think that providing autonomy can bring a big achievement.

I also don't believe that everything will open up if autonomy is provided. Autonomy is a kind of strong self-control and it is to be seen whether culturally we have the tendency to achieve that. If that is so, we welcome autonomy.

**Aly Zaker:** With reference to Saleem's statement that decaying has started we need to mention the causes behind it and need to bring them into focus. One of the reason for the rotting is that the programme maker or producer is not recruited directly which was there during the Pakistan period. That is why, as Saleem mentioned, that there were many talented producers in the initial days of the television. Now a floor manager or a cable boy through promotion and length of service can also become a producer which is very detrimental thing for a creative media like the television. We are axing our own feet.



### Among those who participated

**Mustafa Monowar,** Media Specialist, **Aly Zaker,** Actor & Director, **Saleem al Deen,** Writer, **Muhammad Jahangir,** Executive Director, Centre for Development Communication, **Fuad Chowdhury,** Commissioning Editor, Ekushey Television, **Aly Zaker,** chairman and Managing Director, Inframe Private Limited, **Meghna Guha Thakurta,** chairperson, International Relations, DU, **Farah Kabir,** Governance and Gender Advisor, The British Council, **Anisul Haque,** The Daily Protham Alo, **Faria Hossain,** Ananda Dhara, **Osama Taseer,** Co-ordinator, YEP Forum, **Rafi Hossain,** YEP talk page incharge

As professor of Drama of Jahangirnagar University Saleem will bear me out that there is Drama department in the Dhaka University. It is there in the Chittagong University, besides that we have different schools of music and they are running different courses. A number of talented artists are coming out of these departments and courses whose works are reflected on the stages in our country but they are not being able to get entry with a job in the television. This is another reason of the deteriorating standard of programmes on Bangladesh Television.

The second thing is that we do admit that all the works under the package programmes have been very high quality productions. At the initial stages of the package programme every Tom, Dick and Harry having money got into the business. A young man knowing nothing of the art might have brought five lakhs to produce a drama in which he just wanted to act opposite one of his favourite actresses. But as soon as things started settling down and the unwanted and unqualified elements were fading away from the drama, music and cultural arena, the package programmes were stopped.

Therefore, I agree with Saleem, that we should have at least one channel which will be totally out of control of the government and which would be run by talented people, where talented producers will work.

**Rafi Hossain:** A question I am repeating is that whether you all who have reached the present position with your hard work and talent are not being able to play any role in policy making today? How can it be done?

**Anisul Haque:** I am just a viewer of the television who sit in front and watches programmes. The present situation reminds me of the example in which a carrot is held in front of a donkey to make it move ahead. Similarly, a Commission for Autonomy of Television was formed as pledged and its report has been kept in the fridge. The report is said to be in process and one day we will get autonomy for the Television. It is not at all a very happy situation for the people.

This is a political process. We have shed blood and have pledged, and it is in the declaration of the three-party guideline of 1990's movement that autonomy will be provided to the Television. After that a democratic government came to power and then another democratic government has come to power but still there is no autonomy. This cannot be accepted.

And as Jahangir Bhai has said that we have no other expectations from the television. Now it is our duty to press upon the government to provide autonomy to the Television. We have to think about it seriously and earn the autonomy for Bangladesh Television.

But our expectations are more on the private channels. What I fear is that this government will not give autonomy to the Television during its tenure. It will give it just before handing over power to the caretaker government after it had formed a body with its obedient people. As a result it will enjoy the benefit of the Television as government organisation and



during the three-month caretaker period can use it as its own propaganda media.

I also believe that autonomy is not all. Government control can be there even after providing autonomy. Actually creativity needs freedom and I believe in obtaining the maximum freedom. For this I think numerous private channels could have been the answer. And that is why even after deciding to focus on BTV we tend to look towards ETV and other entrepreneurs of private channels. We hope that they will be making good programmes.

It is only possible on part of the government to provide subsidy in making good programme for national interest. Providing entertainment is not the only job of the media, it needs to provide information, education and motivation. I have a doubt about how far the private channels, who would be dependent on advertisers, can carry out this responsibility. A government-subsidised organisation has to be there. This organisation even at loss will provide us with good programmes like that of National Geography, BBC or Cartoon Network. These sort of programmes even with subsidies are needed.

My expectation might be too much but we want a free state, a true democracy and a free media. We need to struggle for these. And another struggle we should continue is for good programmes.

**Aly Zaker:** When we did not have democracy it seemed to us as dream. Today Anis said we want true democracy. So, we wanted democracy and celebrated its achievement and now telling people about true democracy. Even after achieving democracy we are talking about



autonomy. What are we going to gain after we obtain autonomy? Everything can be right if our disposition is right. So, on the basis of the discussion here I think our disposition is not right.

As a citizen I think the credibility of Bangladesh Television has to be restored. I consider that the first responsibility of

the television should be to bring back its credibility through its activities. I feel this as it hurts me because I find people to doubt even programmes on our liberation war. So, what else do we have to lose? I am talking about the spirit of our liberation war. On occasion of Ekushey February we do lot of programmes related to the movement. Side by side, if you see the role of television, they are running programmes like Sindabad, the programme, the culture which is not mine. There are cartoons which are educational even to us at this age. And then there are films which are fit to be thrown away into the dustbin. Those who consider Bangladesh as a dustbin send those films here and Bangladesh happily brings them paying foreign currency and run it on Television.

On one hand are programmes on the history, the spirit, the pain of our Language Movement and side by side BTV is proving that we can broadcast cheap films.

We talk about the spirit of liberation war. Sometimes I question to myself, what is the spirit of our liberation war? Performing the responsibility towards the country and the people from our respective position is more of the spirit of liberation war rather than talking all the time about the deaths and all.

I want to put a question to you all and expect an answer that whether Bangladesh Television does any programme as part of its responsibility towards the nation and the people?

There are programmes being made on Palli Geeti, Bhawalya. The programme Hijo Tamal is being made with a clay pot hanging in a jute bag at the back of the stage, a roof resting over a bamboo and the artist is going on singing. Who is interested to see such programmes? But I as a maker can challenge that the young generation who enjoy alien culture can also be attracted towards our culture of Lalon Geeti, Palli Geeti, Bhawalya if it is presented properly. Our young generation can be coerced to watch these programme as they are our own culture. One who is being taught in the English medium does not mean that he is being detached from the roots. We actually are not being able to make him feel that he has a root. We, in fact, are isolating them.

Saleem al Deen was saying that his dramas are not being run for the second time maybe because they are not popular. I have been acting for a long time and we have here people like Aly Zaker who can also say that Saleem al Deen had been the most popular dramatist of Bangladesh Television. I can tell you one name after another which people still remember. There were dramas like "Ashrute Gandhar", "Monira Mokassala", "Rakter Angulita", "Ek Din Ek Ratri". Time has changed so much that at one time we had the name of films like "Sutarang", "Palabadi", "Aina O Obashista" and now we have "Baba Kano Chakar", "Shami Kano Ashami". Similarly, the names of television dramas have also changed like "Tumi Je Amar" or "Amar Tumi" or "Prapatti Amar" or "He Amar Rani" and so on. We have pulled ourselves down to this stage. Have we forgotten that Professor Abdullah Abu Sayeed used to do a programme called "Saptabarna" on Television wearing a panjabi and pajama? He used to talk in very proper language and yet could make us laugh. He did not have to put much effort in it. Now why they have to use language like "Kayta Chilla Lobon Lagaya Dimu"? How did we reach this stage. I think the television has continually fed us with this type of thing and brought the taste to this standard.

**Farah Kabir:** First of all those, in the television or in the policy making of the television have taken it for granted that the audience are fools. In our country we do not respect our audience. We are not aware of the thoughts, the understanding and the comprehension of our viewers and we start with a premise that they do not understand anything and they don't have any aesthetic sense. They think that the audience will take whatever they give them. The second premise is he is talking about the potentials.

One more thing, has the Bangladesh Television till today conducted any survey of its audience? It is a government institution. Everywhere in the world an organisation conducts its evaluation and audience survey. The Bangladesh Television was launched in 1964 and

this is 1999. Has BTV conducted any survey in these years. If it has done so why wasn't the



views of the survey made public? We are getting individual views and if all the views are compiled together.

**Aly Zaker:** For the information of YEP, I want to tell you that this survey is being done by the private sector. Television Rating Point (TRP) rating is being done absolutely professionally. It has now started in the four metropolitan cities of the country and gradually will be spread in the semi-urban areas. The business houses are doing it for their own interest.

**Farah Kabir:** Is this an audience survey or is it focused towards advertisement? There is an audience survey towards messages. It has been done in the health sector by the Social Marketing Company. It is focused on health messages and information. Is it an overall programme presentation listing the total programmes?

**Aly Zaker:** What TRP/GRP is focused on which programme is seen for how long by whom? There is a panel of 4000 in each metropolitan city. Which person in a family sees which programme for how long. Details are kept of which channel is switched on when and for how long.

This is very confidential still and therefore for guarding business interest they will not make it public. But eventually they will be declassified after nearly a year.

**Meghna Guha Thakurta:** Some points have come up which can ultimately be included in the recommendation.

Regarding the problems, technology is a point. You need cameramen, sound equipment and everything is needed for television and obviously the question of a big investment, technology and training come up. These are all necessary for creativity which is being stated during the discussion. You need trained people on technology and at the same time creativity is necessary.

Three types of options have come up from the discussion so far and they are autonomy, government job and private sector.

Our recommendations should include recruitment issue because only social commitment will not help. We should say exactly where the interventions are needed. Can't we as viewers say anything about recruitment and training? The training in the departments of the university was raised here. In fact, I don't know how much films and television are covered in those departments. A survey is necessary to find out the percentage of recruitment in television of those trained in these departments.

**Aly Zaker:** I was saying about harnessing of the human resources. These departments are ideal places for harnessing. After harnessing if you recruit these people they already have a creative bent of mind. They wouldn't have studied those subjects unless they have had a creative bent of mind. After recruitment you then send them for training. NIMCO is there for training, all you need is staffing there.



**Meghna Guha Thakurta:** NIMCO is a graveyard of all unwanted persons. Exactly, they should be somewhere else.

**Aly Zaker:** But you have to go to them for the training. They can provide the training. If Mustafa Monowar gives the training today to a young boy having recruited him from the

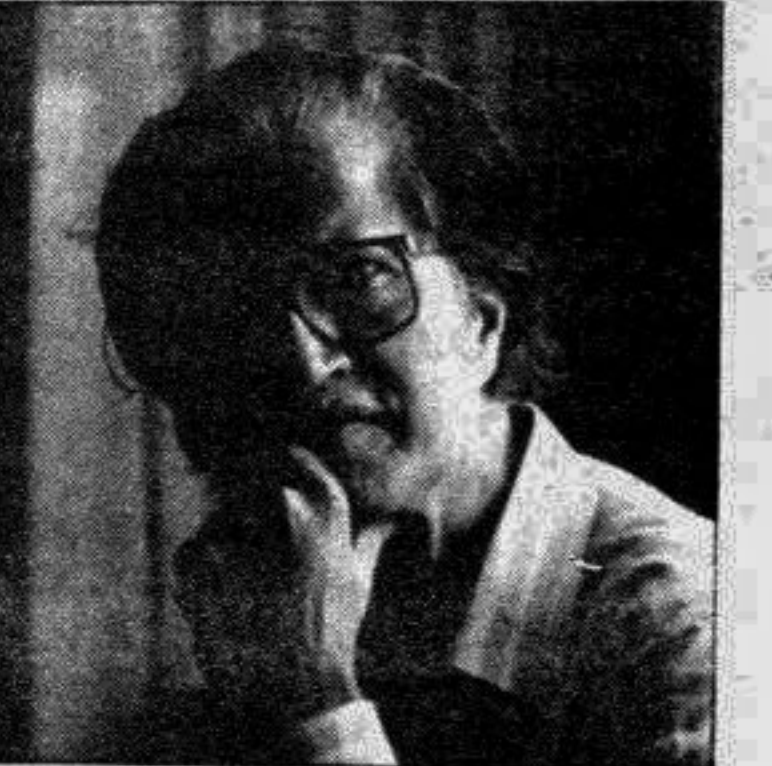
Dhaka University's journalism department or the Jahangirnagar University, the thing he will get is unparalleled.

**Meghna Guha Thakurta:** So, there are three options we have here: government, corporation and the private sector. For training why should NIMCO be the only answer. Why can't the private sector open the scope for training? If the demand is there, I think the private sector can come forward in this regard. If the bureaucracy is deducted there can be more creativity. This is one of my proposals.

To me making of the programme and audience are two different things. Audience is very large, it is not only the urban middle class. We are abusing the programmes but it has a very constructive image of the middle class.

I also agree that better programmes can be made because there is talent. Apart from the programmes for middle class if you speak about the tribal programmes, they are being broadcast from Chittagong Television but it is the same songs and the same faces. There is no originality in it.

If we can somehow demonstrate, from the private sector or the satellite channels, that these programmes are salable and can build up a new audience, there the surveys are important to link the programmes with the audience. It is not to convince the government. The government, corporation and private sector, all these three can stay side by side but a connection is needed to find out that through which channel can creativity, technology and training be coordinated. Even private sector may not be the answer. There has been many private universities who are taking in part-time resource persons from the government sector, but are they getting the expected output. Time is not wasted, there is no harm and there is regular studies, but are we getting the people we want at the end of the day. This guarantee is not there in the private sector but there are possibilities.



**Mustafa Monowar:** Some vital words like 'people' and 'popular' have come up during the discussion. The word 'popular' is both very damaging for any television and then again very profitable.

Another point is the policy of the Television. When I first went to Japan, I read their five policies and the first one was to elevate culture. It is to elevate culture then it is of course not popular. The culture which is not acceptable at the point has to be lifted.

'Vulgar' does not mean anything bad, 'vulgar' means what the people like. 'Vulgar' programmes will undoubtedly be popular. It is not my say, 'Vulgar' means popularity, 'vulgar' is what people like. Then the word 'people' has to be defined.

Now, who will do this popular programme? There are two sides of a television programme. One is to elevate culture and the other is to sell the product. Television is not apart from these two. Those who sell goods are bound to tend towards popularity. The number is vital then.

We are talking about surveys and all. How many people are watching is the concern of the commercial people. They will put the advertisement there.

And to elevate culture we have to see if 10 out of 1000 people are watching television. And who are those 10 people? They are those whom the nation respect, who are culturally very developed. If those 10 people say the programme is good then it is a successful programme.

What will be do. If it is a commercial television, we will only sell. The more the people, the more the benefit. It is like having more voters.

In respect to culture. The increase in number of people will never be good. No poet or writer had taken vote to write his works. He on himself went on writing. Maybe it was not liked in the beginning then the liking started.

So, there is national television and commercial television. The responsibility of the national television is to elevate culture. Whether the programmes are like or not liked by the people, they have to run them.

To be continued