

Supreme Court and the ETV

Encourage more private TV channels

We thank the Supreme Court for staying, till October 4, the High Court order to suspend broadcasting by Ekushey Television (ETV). We plead with our highest court that the suspension order be stayed even further, till the process of trial is complete, which may take a while given both the unique nature of the case and the sensitive nature of the organisation being tried.

Our position in this case is as follows. 1. No institution is above the law. If ETV has broken the law or has not fulfilled its requirement in both letter and spirit then it must bear the consequence. 2. ETV has performed well and has established its credibility as a quality TV station. Its performance over the period that it has been in the public domain must be taken into account in passing judgement on it. 3. We must consider whether public interest has suffered or has been better served because of the existence of ETV. Our unhesitant and emphatic answer is that we have been very well served by ETV and as such this must also be considered before passing any verdict on ETV. 4. Finally, under no circumstances should its transmission be closed, even for a minute, while the trial is going on because then it will amount to ETV being punished even before the Supreme Court has made up its mind.

In terms of TV programming and international transmission we have been behind other regional countries, especially India and Pakistan. BTV miserably failed to give us quality entertainment and credible news programmes. And it never really tried to broadcast internationally. In less than two years ETV has changed all this. It brought about significant and laudable improvements in both programmes and news casting and took Bangladesh abroad through its networks in the Middle East and Europe. ETV today stands as a credible and alternative source of TV news which has effectively served the public to enable them to make informed judgement on national and international issues.

As we said earlier, no institution, however effective and successful, is above the law. If ultimately ETV is found to have done anything wrong let the punishment be in terms of financial compensation to the government and not, under any circumstances, closure of the station.

We do not want ETV to enjoy any monopoly privilege either. The Supreme Court should consider opening up the filed of private TV to further competition. Let all those whose applications were ignored earlier (when ETV was given permission) be given chance and also new comers encouraged to enter the field. Like every other field, perhaps more so, the media is well served by competition.

A new war and a new peace

Global realities force greater accommodation of smaller voices

THE global crisis spawned by terrorism is manifesting itself in strange and sometimes unexpected ways. As the main players try to cobble together a global if not a united response, many factors are emerging to decide the shape of international politics. New and old enemies are having to shake hands as the dynamics of cooperation overrides equations of hostility. Middle East is no exception.

Although the present crisis has been ignited at the immediate level by the Western world's handling of Middle East and inordinate support for the Israeli lobby, the focus now is on ensuring working peace in that geography. That means taking Arab view of the conflict into account to win their support. The result has been an almost forced meeting between Israel and Palestine to discuss cease-fire and ultimately peace.

Israel apparently was expecting that in the wake of the attack, and a blanket condemnation of terrorism, the Palestinian issue would be submerged and Israel would get a free hand in dealing with the Palestinians. But events have shown that, as the USA campaigns for collective action, they need to listen to many sides. It's a reality check for the USA, not used to such reserve.

In the same vein, USA is also not demanding the toppling of the Afghan government. Nor is it advocating mass attacks that will pulverize Afghanistan, as it was initially feared. They appear now to be more aware of the opinion especially held in Muslim majority countries that innocent Afghanis should be spared. The views of the less powerful are also counted along with the dominating voices of the mighty.

In this new arrangement of give and take, one hopes both the powerful and the not-so learn that accommodation of the other is fundamental to conduct war or search for peace.

K.M SHEHABUDDIN

THE U.S. is without doubt the single most powerful political entity in the world today. No important decision is taken today on major regional and international issues in the world, not even at the U.N., without U.S. initiative or leadership. Whether there should be a peacekeeping force in a troubled spot, whether there should be joint military action or sanctions against an aggressor country, whether there should be investments by Western democracies or by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, or the Asian Development Bank in a particular country all these matters are largely decided under U.S. leadership. The United States decides which countries deserve to be labeled a rogue state, and which do not. The U.S., through the State Department and various NGOs, also has the power and authority to determine whether a country is adhering to human rights or the set standards on environments. Most Western democracies tend to follow U.S. findings and judgments on such matters. It is well known that the U.S. State Department's annual report on human rights in other countries creates tremors in many capitals every year!

Deeply committed to freedom and democracy, the United States has at times led efforts around the globe to strengthen those values. Without the U.S.-led coalition against Iraqi occupation in 1990-91, Kuwait might have disappeared permanently from the map of the world. Similarly, the U.S. used its military might in concert with other powers to safeguard various communities in the Balkans. Given its commitment to such noble values as freedom, democracy and self-determination, it is incumbent upon the U.S. as a superpower to play a more effective role for peace and security in the Middle East, to find a fair, just and impartial solution to the present conflict, and to do so despite pressure from the powerful pro-Israeli lobby in the U.S.

In the end, as all of us might be aware, the basic principle governing U.S. policy in bilateral or international relations is its own national interest. It was national interest

the form of the need for a steady supply of oil from the Gulf states, and not simply outrage at the illegal occupation of one state by another, that led President George Bush Senior, to organize a grand coalition against Iraq in 1990-91 following that country's invasion and occupation of Kuwait. Bangladesh was a proud participant in that coalition. United States also did not hesitate to drop atom bombs in Nagasaki and Hiroshima during the Second World War to stop Japanese aggression on its soil and as a stern warning to Hitler. Similarly, despite strong political, economic, and cultural ties with European nations, the U.S. has no qualms about gathering intelligence on European industries in order to safeguard its national interest.

the office because they did not have the two-thirds majority in the Senate required for the purpose. The Democrats refused to cooperate with the Republicans, accusing them of partisan bias. Similarly, it is believed that the U.S. Supreme Court, dominated by Republican judges, essentially awarded the Presidency to George W. Bush in a partisan manner on technical legal grounds, overruling the objections of the Democratic Supreme Court of Florida.

Many argue that, in some instances, the use of advanced technology in total disregard of "human intelligence" has worked against U.S. interests. Some have argued, for instance, that had the CIA and the FBI resorted to old-fashioned techniques such as the

-- Wrangler, Levi's, McDonalds, to name a few. Similarly, American music and movies have fans the world over. This dominance does not happen by chance. U.S. high government officials, including the President, Secretaries, Senators and Congressmen, senior bureaucrats and business executives do not hesitate to call or write to leaders of other countries and work tirelessly to promote U.S. business interests -- and with great success.

The very important role that lobbyists play in Washington, D.C. may be emphasized as well. Every interest group or a country with bilateral or international problems employs lobbyist firms in the U.S. to muster support for its cause in the administration and the Congress. For instance, India and Pakistan

dor to the United States to bring them under one platform did not succeed.

Effective lobbying has been seen at work in the case of China as well. Despite America's unhappiness over China's human rights records, large number of American companies eager to invest in China and take advantage of the world's largest domestic market have successfully lobbied the U.S. administration and Congress to foster favourable trade relations between China and the U.S.

Military superpower and the current crisis

The United States' response to the attacks of September 11 has accentuated the nation's status as the lone superpower on earth. Stunned and

as the lone superpower on the planet, the United States has the ability to push ahead at full steam with its own agenda. With the disappearance of the Soviet Union, the superpower status of the United States is today unique and total.

In the present crisis, all powers forming the European Union, the Russian Federation, China, India, Pakistan and many other countries are falling over themselves to join the grand alliance against terrorism at the request of the U.S. President. They do so out of conviction but in many cases, also out of fear of incurring American displeasure. The United States had very clearly outlined the criteria for its friendship with another country. President Bush has stated, "A country is either with us or with the terrorists". There is no third option. Support for its war against terrorism will be considered a friendly act and as a friend, the U.S. can be very helpful. A country's refusal to join the coalition against terrorism will cast it immediately in the ranks of the enemy and to be labeled thus can politically and economically devastating to that country. Very few nations therefore can afford to defy American will.

It is of course primarily for diplomatic reasons that the United States is seeking to form a grand alliance and muster near unanimous support for its war against terrorism. The U.S. has an impressive military, navy and air force, capable of fighting any enemy. Its aircraft or missiles, for instance, whether stationed in the U.S. or on permanent bases and fleets around the globe, are within moments of any target. America's superpower status further ensures that no country can disregard its request for the use of temporary facilities such as airspace, port or land in its war against terrorism. As seen in the last few days, Pakistan, despite its historical friendly ties with neighbouring Afghanistan and strong favourable sentiments for the Afghan people, has quickly agreed to provide such facilities to the U.S. -- in exchange for an attractive package of course that includes, among other things, the lifting of sanctions against it.

K M Shehabuddin is former Ambassador of Bangladesh to the United States

Who will monitor the poll monitoring agencies?

ZAHAID HOSSAIN

THE unprecedented controversy and conflicting comments about the neutrality and eligibility of some of the local election monitoring agencies have created doubts in the minds of the public about the political colour and contents of the monitoring reports to be produced by them, although no eyebrows have so far been raised from any quarters regarding the more than 200 foreign election observers who will also be observing the 8th Parliament Election.

As the background, when the National Citizens Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL) monitored the Philippines' pivotal elections in 1986, it demonstrated the critical role of local monitoring in guaranteeing the integrity of an election process. Since then, local monitoring has been almost an institutional feature throughout Asia and has been playing a critical role in ensuring democratic elections worldwide.

Local election monitoring by non-partisan groups contributes to a more genuine election process by encouraging fair campaign practices and an informed electorate. The primary purpose of local monitoring groups is generally to safeguard the integrity of the election process. Through this efforts they are supposed to reduce the possibility of fraud and irregularities before, during and after election day and encourage public confidence in the process.

Citizens' right

In fact the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Universal Declara-

tion) and various international treaties establish the right of citizens to participate in the governance of their country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. Article 21 of the Universal Declaration states in part that: The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of a government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures. Other international instruments mirror and elaborate upon these rights. The precise characteristics of the right to participate in govern-

trust

Conscious of their sovereignty and local political necessity, many countries are reluctant to invite monitors to their elections. But most welcome election observers. While monitors are able to play an active and intervening role, observers are considered spectators. Both local monitors and foreign observers observe the preparation and running of elections to ensure that the integrity of the electoral process is respected. Observation generates trust and confidence in the election process and can also contribute significantly to its credibility. Election observation is a com-

protecting human rights. Elections represent an embodiment of democratic values recognised by the international community.

Political parties, candidates and the public are acutely interested in the assessment reports of observers. Election observation builds citizens confidence in the integrity of the election process, which encourages them to exercise their voting rights. Observers can play a positive role in creating an atmosphere conducive to general participation in elections.

Anyway, these are all basically theoretical aspects of the many facets of election monitoring by the

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ment and electoral rights are fully delimited in international human rights instruments, and the role of election monitors in guaranteeing these rights is no longer seriously contested.

Article 7 of the 1990 Copenhagen Document of the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), which calls on participating states to accept international and domestic election observers, affirms the proposition that election observers can play an important role in democratic elections. Observance of this policy is also routinely reflected in the practices of sovereign governments as well as the programmes conducted by intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

Observation generates

plex task that should only be performed by people who are non-partisan, objective, impartial, honest and free of hidden motives. Observation is a form of fact-finding attesting to the fair and free nature of elections. By acting on the premise of neutrality and non-interference, observers can report to the government and to the outside world on the authenticity and quality of an election.

The International Institute for Electoral Assistance (IDEA) defines observation as the purposeful gathering of information regarding an electoral process. Informed judgements are made on the conduct of electoral players and the quality of the process based on information collected. Electoral observation is often seen as a contributing factor in realising and

locals. But coming back to the controversies and conflicting comments on the neutrality and thus eligibility of local election monitoring agencies, at least some of their operational apparatus warrant close examination for a credible monitoring exercise. Otherwise, the whole purpose of monitoring the election will be defeated.

According to newspaper reports and other available information the ensuing parliament election will be monitored by more than fifty local agencies and some of them have formed alliances to establish their credibility and acceptability. In the meantime two major political parties have reiterated their reservations about the neutrality of some monitoring agencies explaining the reasons of their objection to the participation of these agencies to

monitor the election. Since the monitoring reports of these agencies will have far reaching impact on the political future and institutionalization of democracy in the country, such complaints by the two major political parties warrant due consideration. Because the monitoring reports of individuals and agencies with questionable political neutrality and having background of irregularities of financial nature will hardly receive due recognition both locally and internationally. As a result, such reports will likely to further compound the already complicated political environment. Such a possible complex

thousands of volunteers for poll monitoring but nobody knows how and on what basis those volunteers have been selected? No advertisements for recruiting such volunteers appeared in the media in the recent past as such the recruitment processes of the volunteers have raised lot of questions by the political parties.

Accountable to people

Some of the local poll monitoring agencies have already confirmed the acceptance of foreign donations for this purpose. But in some cases detailed information on budgetary provisions of expenditure have reportedly been maintained unsystematically and not following the financial rules, indicating lack of transparency and financial irregularities. This is yet another serious complaint against many of the local monitoring agencies.

Finally in order to be credible the local monitoring agencies must ensure that they are genuinely non-partisan and are perceived as such. It is both essential and possible to ensure that they do not oppose or support or identify with or against any particular party either directly or indirectly. Local monitoring agencies should move from ad-hoc arrangement at election time to permanent institutionalised arrangement and in the interests of sustainability and independence local sources of finance need to be developed instead of accepting foreign donations. Thus the question automatically arises as to who will monitor the activities of the poll monitoring agencies at least to assess their performances because they are also equally accountable to the people in general and particularly the voters.

PHOTORIAL

Readers are invited to send in exclusive pictures, colour or black and white, of editorial value, with all relevant information including date, place and significance of subject matter. Pictures received will not be returned.



STAR PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Hartal with a difference

They kept their shutters down demanding right to keep them open safely. The shopowners of Babupura area in the city observed half day token strike recently as a mark of protest against intermittent robbery they have been made victims of in the absence of any effective steps or actions by the authorities concerned. It's a hartal with a difference, to activate the authorities on a cause!

Other side of the coin

I am an average American citizen with no political agenda. But I am writing this because it pains me to read that any citizens around the world believe that America is somehow against Islam and its followers. Too much of our news usually comes through filters such as government censorship or large media conglomerates. But the truth is often best expressed by the average citizen. I want to convey to my fellow men that my country, though we have occasional faults, is actually very receptive to Islam and its followers. I can cite several examples of this support.

America provided financial and military support for the Afghan troops fighting the Soviet invasion in the late 1970s and early '80s. It did not worry us that the majority of those fighters were Muslim, nor did it stop us from providing them with support.

Much of our foreign aid budget goes to countries with a predominantly Muslim population. For example, we provide over \$2 billion a year to Egypt and this week lifted

import duties on millions of dollars of goods from Indonesia. Most people around the world have seen images of the fearsome American war machine in the Balkans. But few remember that in Kuwait, Kosovo and Bosnia, we were fighting to protect the lives and freedoms of populations that were predominantly Muslim.

America admits thousands of immigrants every year from Islamic countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Pakistan. It defies reason that our country would welcome so many new citizens from these places if we were anti-Islam. And nothing stands in their way of free worship, as evidenced by the thousands of mosques throughout America.

We try to give those citizens a warm welcome, whether they are Muslim or Sikh or Buddhist or Christian. Here in San Francisco, I am proud to financially support a group that works with women who have fled Afghanistan, with the goal of finding them skilled, high-paying jobs. The people running this organisation (called Upwardly

Global) are not Muslim, but desire to give these Afghan refugees a warm welcome. I realise that not everything my country does is right. Yes, there are some ignorant Americans who persecute those who look different, but the vast majority of us choose to embrace diversity rather than to attack it. Yes, we have some times leaned too far in supporting Israel, but I'll also point out that Bill Clinton met with Yasser Arafat more than he did with any other foreign leader. And I am one of the many Americans who hope and pray that the Palestinians will one day have their own homeland. My plea is simple: please do not believe those who want to tell you that America is anti-Islam. We are simply anti-terrorist.

John Wood,
on e-mail

Terrorism is here...

When the psychopaths let their anger show through their weird marksmanship at crashing into the World Trade Center, this not only collapsed the building but also put the study-abroad students and

faculty more at a disadvantage than usual in the USA.

Nothing big. Not maybe as bad as the victims who died in the World Trade Center but a few events here and there. A person who cried out right in the middle of the Student Union on campus "Rag the Muslims!" Which I later found out means to stand in the dark and physically abuse anyone who had brown complexion and black to brown hair. Who notices the difference in the dark? The students being worried were advised not to go out after dark.

Thank you terrorist forces. You make it so much more easier for the Muslims and Asians living abroad.

The racists in America sure had their glory day. You are aware that a mosque got burnt and a Pakistani tire dealership got burnt to the ground in Texas. A Sikh person mistaken to be a Muslim got killed in New York.

I am sure they were all part of the clan who declared "Jihad". I mean let's terrorize everyone who is a Muslim, I am sure that will teach them a lesson. Do they know what Jihad really means?

Much as I hate to say this, some of my American friends did not. So

we decided to create a panel which would bring students together from all over to understand our religion (Islam) and the concept of "Jihad". Believe it or not the response was overwhelming. People had questions from what they thought was wrong with the whole picture to where our religion came from.

Did you know that it is rumoured that the terrorists were in a strip bar just the night before and those forces don't even know how to read Arabic? I am sure their leader wrote down 'his fanaticism' in phrases which he had his followers read out loud.

As we explained, discussed and in the process learned a bit more ourselves, we found out this: There was Adam and Eve and we are all followers of the one God who is supreme above all.

Beware! You experience terrorism daily in Bangladesh. You still have not said 'NO!' to it-yet. Next time it happens to you, please do.

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