

# 10 TV channels

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arrested former BNP MPs Salauddin Ahmed and Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu..

In comparison to the speedy issuing of licences and frequencies, other applicants have had to undergo detailed examinations of their proposals which in some cases have taken years and are still not completed.

Channel i and Ekushey Television (ETV), had to wait for over an year to receive their licences from the information ministry before the BNP came to power. Channel i Director, Shykh Shiraj told The Daily Star, "It took us over a year to get the licence. We had to go through several different stages of the application process."

"We were asked to go to a number of interviews and provide several detailed documents for months," he said, adding, "It took us two years more to get our frequency from BTTC to telecast our live news from Dhaka."

Sources said, the licences of at least three of the BNP linked channels, Channel 1, Rtv and ntv received their licences without being discussed in an inter-ministerial meeting, normally a precondition for receiving a private television licence under the government rules of business.

A large number of the applicants already working in the industry have had their applications languishing at the ministry for years, sources add.

Some of these applications, which were already being processed up till 2001, have not moved in the ministry since the BNP-led coalition came to power.

Information Secretary Didarul Anwar told The Daily Star, "A private satellite television channel licence application would have to sent to the concerned ministries and authorities, such as the Law Ministry or the BRTC."

He refused to comment on decisions taken by past governments saying he was only transferred to the post a month ago. However he said legal steps were now being taken to establish a firmer framework for the awarding of licences.

During its time in office the BNP-led government made no attempt to change the Operational Guidelines for Establishing Private Television Channels established in 1998.

These vague guidelines were used to withdraw the licence approval of three channels that were not owned or backed by BNP leaders. The channels were Jamuna TV, Inqilab TV, and UTV.

The government gave Jamuna TV both terrestrial and satellite broadcasting rights, but suddenly revoked them without explanation in 2005. When the High Court ordered that Jamuna TV be allowed to broadcast, the government appealed. Even though the Supreme Court put a two-week time limit on the hearing, the hearing is yet to take place.

**NTV:** The jewel in the crown of BNP linked TV empire, Falu's ntv showed the way for others on how to exert political influence to acquire TV licences and then flex its political muscles to gain advertising.

Eighteen days is all it took for Falu to push through ntv's licence at the information ministry, without any necessary meetings, inquiries or interviews by the ministry to check whether ntv met the criteria outlined in the government's private television channel guidelines.

The channel was also allocated a frequency within a week by BTTC.

As International Television Channel Ltd, ntv's parent company, was languishing at the information ministry since 1999, Falu bought the company in 2004 and pushed through its licence approval in break-neck speed.

Although the Managing Director of Ntv, Enayetur Rahman (now arrested) and his wife Sabina Rahman are the next biggest shareholders after Falu in International Television Channel Ltd, Falu's wife, brother-in-law and other relatives all hold shares.

Salman Karim, the son of the disgraced Orion Group Chairman Obaidul Karim, also owns 40 thousand shares of the company, purchased on April 1, 2004. Obaidul also invested in the daily newspaper Amar Desh, also owned by Falu.

With an authorised capital of Tk 100 crore and paid up capital of 20 crore, experts believe the company to be worth around Tk 200 crore. The channel has international offices in the United States.

Falu further pushed up ntv's profits by pushing through permission required for importing equipment tax free.

Ntv's director-shareholders are: Falu, his wife Mahbuba Sultana, former Chairman and currently under Anti-Corruption Commission investigation Md Abu Taher, Anjan Chowdhury of Mediacom, Salman Karim, Mahboob Morshed Hassan, Md Younis, Mostafa Sharuar, Shahidul Haque and Md Abu Sufian.

Ntv's offices were badly damaged in the February 26 fire at BSEC building.

**CHANNEL ONE:** The majority shareholder and the public face of Channel 1 is Tarique's closest aide and trusted friend, Giasuddin Al Mamun. He owns 2500 out of the 10 thousand shares, while others including his close associate and friend, the now arrested former

MP MAH Salim owned 1200 shares of the company.

He was also the chairman of Channel 1's parent company One Entertainment Ltd, with a monthly turnover of just over Tk 3 crore.

They were given the licence within 26 days when they applied for it January 5, 2005 and the information ministry granted their licence on January 31, 2005. BTTC then allocated their frequency within four days of application. No tariff was paid on any of the equipment.

**RTV:**

The smaller and youngest of Falu's two television channels, Rtv, received the information ministry's permission within five and a half months. Falu became the chairman of Rtv's parent company National Television Ltd, although he did not hold the majority shares in company, which were held by Jubo Karmashangthan Society-Jubok.

According to documents obtained from the office of the registrar of Joint Stock of Companies, National Television Ltd, Falu's wife and Falu's business partner Enayetur Rahman and his wife Sabina, were all directors.

Estimated by market experts to be worth around Tk 80 crore, its authorised capital was 100 crore and paid up capital was 30 crore.

Sources say Jubok, with only two directors on the board, was trying to sell its shares but changed its mind after Falu was arrested. Rtv's offices were also badly damaged from the February 26 fire.

**BANGLA VISION:**

One of the two smaller is one of the two smaller satellite channels that did not have any BNP leaders holding shares. But Bangla Vision insiders say Dhaka Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khoka was the power behind the channel's operation and several other BNP leaders have stakes in the channel.

The channel's parent company, Shamol Bangla Media Ltd, is estimated to be worth around Tk 70-80 crore, with a monthly turnover of around Tk 2-3 crore, sources say.

The initial investment into the channel was Tk 56 crore, while the authorised capital was Tk 20 crore and paid up capital was Tk 9.9 crore.

Although Bangla Vision is one of the three licences to be granted on January 31, the information ministry held back the channel's licence from the TV station's licence, from lodging its application on May 30, 2004 to its approval on January 31, 2005. They were also provided with the international broadcasting frequency by the BTTC within five days.

Several Bangla Vision sources say, Khoka had an office on the twelfth floor of Noor Tower on Bangla Vision premises, where he held meetings with Bangla Vision staff at least once or twice a week. He negotiated and decided all major business deals for the channel, and also decided on personnel.

Sources add, Bangla Vision's managing director and majority shareholder Abdul Haque was a close associate of Khoka and a business partner who negotiated several business deals on Khoka's behalf. Abdul Haque owns 40, 110 shares of Bangla Vision parent company Shamol Bangla Media Ltd's 99 thousand shares.

A number of other BNP leaders are alleged to be involved with the channel, but their links with the channel could not be substantiated.

**BAISHAKHI TV:**

Baishakhi TV is the smallest out of the big five channels and the second channel with no BNP leaders with any direct shares.

However, several sources in the information ministry and within the channel itself said, that the now arrested former Housing and Public Works Minister Mirza Abbas was the power behind the scenes at the TV channel. Market analysts say the channel is currently estimated to be worth around Tk 70-80 crore.

According to documents accessed through the Joint Stock of Companies, the Managing Director of the company, and a large shareholder of Baishakhi Media Ltd. is AYM Kamal, who is a well known BNP leader and a very close associate of Abbas.

Sources say, AYM Kamal was recently taken in for questioning by the intelligence agencies to inquire about Abbas' wealth. Kamal allegedly was also a business partner of Abbas.

The others with major shares in the company are Abbas' brother-in-law AMB Habibul Haque, who has 1 lakh shares.

Further evidence of Abbas' involvement with Baishakhi was revealed on May 29 last year, when MNU Bulu, a former director of the tv channel filed a lawsuit against Mirza Abbas, where he alleged that Abbas and his associates AYM Kamal and Shahidullah set up Baishakhi television.

He also mentioned that Abbas was involved in running the channel.

Information ministry sources say, Abbas played a significant role in pushing through Baishakhi's licence approval within four months and ten days of application. Baishakhi's application was submitted on September 9, 2004 and approved on

January 31, 2005, the same day as Channel 1.

It was allocated its frequency by BTTC on the same day as two of the other BNP-linked channels Channel 1 and Bangla Vision.

**OTHER BNP-RELATED TV CHANNELS:**

Former Information Secretary Abdul Quayum gave permission to two television channels Focus TV and Diganta TV. Focus TV, which is set to come out with a news channel named CSB, is set to be broadcast from overseas.

Ministry sources say, Salauddin's political influence weighed in on the approval of Focus TV within two months. Falu became the chairman of Rtv's parent company National Television Ltd, although he did not hold the majority shares in company, which were held by Jubo Karmashangthan Society-Jubok.

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However, the report carried by The Daily Star did not mention that Bangla Vision was not maintaining the government standard regarding effluent. It highlighted that the factory's water discharged into public lands was damaging crops of farmers, despite the fact that the factory was maintaining an environmental standard.

They also mentioned that they maintain pH levels in their treated water within an acceptable range of six to nine.

They said the effluent water discharged from their factory should not affect crops, rather the water should be in high demand for irrigation during the lean period.

In the statement the GNFL authorities also stated that their company believes in corporate and ethical environment practices. "The GNFL would relentlessly work to further improve the efficiency of its effluent plant for all of us to enjoy the clean environment," the clarification added.

**OUR REPLY**

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# Tarique's bail

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Wednesday as per direction of the home ministry to prevent him from indulging in corruption and other activities, sources said.

Judge Momin Ullah of the Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court fixed April 4 for hearing on the issue with lower court record.

The

bail

petition

order

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court

on

March