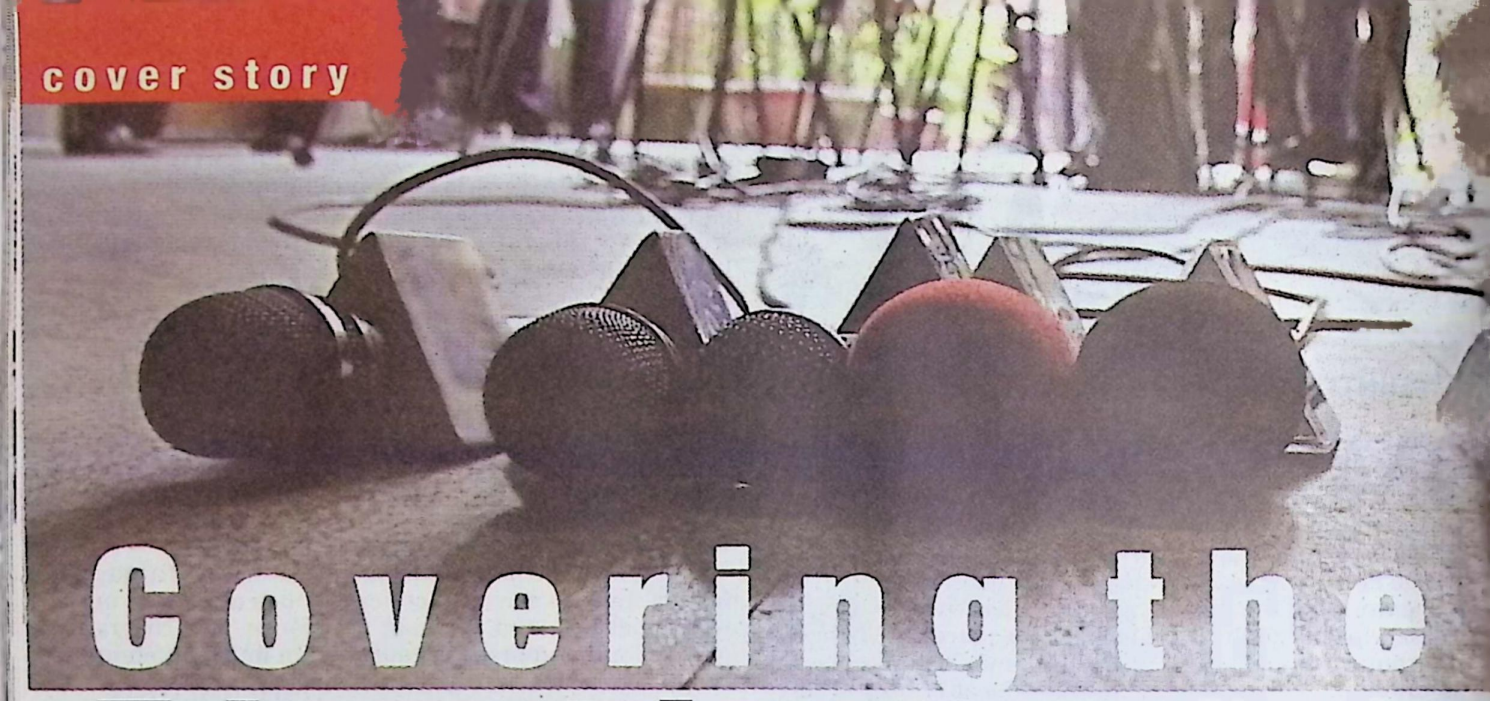


Covering the Elections

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There is no denying the fact that the electronic media is the most powerful tool for any politician, if he or she can get access to it that is. Because of instant audio-visual coverage of the political events TV channels are hugely popular. People get live news of the current political development through these channels. In the up-coming elections the electronic media has chalked out elaborate programmes featuring the election preparation at different constituencies, political views, talk shows and so on. Way ahead of the upcoming long awaited national elections, scheduled to be held on December 29, many political parties have demanded 'proper treatment' of news coverage. With the widespread reach of Bangladesh Television (BTV) as well as the 10 private channels, it is understandable that political parties want a fair share of the publicity. Many political parties have already demanded that the government ensure that BTV and Bangladesh Betar play a neutral role during the election as well as urged the mass media not to broadcast political advertisements.

Objective coverage of course is easier said than done. BTV and Bangladesh Betar have uncontested access in the remote areas, but neither of the state-run organisations enjoy autonomy. As a result both the organisations have traditionally played a partisan character to serve the interest of the ruling party or government. On the other hand, seven out of 10 private TV channels got licenses during the rule of the Four-Party Alliance based on political affiliation with cronies and party supporters getting priority since there is no comprehensive act or ordinance for giving such license. Thanks to the No Clearance Certificates (NOC) granted to these channels by the Ministry of Information, regular programmes are being aired. These channels are not paying the ministry either.

The partisan character of some of the TV channels owned by the leaders of political parties has been quite apparent in news coverage following the recent declaration of the election schedule. A particular channel owned by a leader of Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami remained conspicuous for being the only channel that live telecasted the announcement of the party's manifesto; another channel well connected with grand alliances telecasted live announcement of the manifesto of the