

The Political Economy of Emergence and Transformation of Private Television Channels in Bangladesh: A Critique

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Analysis of television reveals the new alliances being forged among transnational corporations, the capitalist state, communication technologies in the era of technocapitalism [Kellner: 1990, p.90]

ABSTRACT

The emergence of private television channels in Bangladesh was a remarkable chapter in Bangladesh's media democratization process. Three private television channels—ATN Bangla, Channel-I, and ETV—were allowed to air during Sheikh Hasina's first regime (1996-2001). All these three private channels brought a qualitative change in the broadcast history of Bangladesh. Bangladesh's people lost their confidence in the state-controlled only TV channel of the country named Bangladesh Television (BTV) simply because of its enslavement towards the government and the ruling party. Private TV channels emerged as windows for ordinary people to get accurate and unbiased news and views of Bangladesh and the world. Later on, during Begum Khaleda Zia's second regime (2001-2006), vicious and dirty party politics enveloped Bangladesh's private TV channels. As a result, private TV channels have been transformed into the government's mouthpiece and a tool for manufacturing consent in favor of the ruling party. This paper focuses on the political economy of private TV channels' emergence and their transformation in Bangladesh. The contention of this paper is to show how the social relations, i.e., communication relations between the ruling party elites and the crony capitalists, form a vicious nexus that brushes aside all rules and regulations for getting a private television channel with a view to becoming a big tool for manufacturing consent in favor of the ruling elites. The paper concludes that any authoritarian government, like a one-party rule, military regime, or even an elected government when it transforms into an autocratic one, always tries to support and sponsor crony capitalists for their political interest, which is a threat to any democracy and media democratization process of any society. The crony capitalists developed a corporate media culture of their own that doesn't give proper treatment of any national concern or issue that goes against the ruling party's interest. There is no space for objective journalism in this media culture. This corporate journalism culture, devoid of professionalism, has replaced ethical journalism in Bangladesh. It has become stronger day by day.

Keywords: Political Economy, Private TV Channels, Emergence, Transformation, Crony Capitalism, Sheikh Hasina, and Begum Khaleda Zia

Introduction

The emergence of private TV channels in Bangladesh is a colorful chapter in the country's media history. People from all walks of life have been privileged to get real news about the country and the world through private TV channels. "The emergence of private televisions has opened new windows for people to get diverse domestic and international news. Private television has created a hunger for news and entertainment among people from different walks of life (Khan and Rahman, 2016, 277). On the other hand, Khan (2020, 2013) found that since 2001 all ruling parties in Bangladesh have used private TV channels as a robust political tool. Thus, a good beginning in the country's media sector has transformed into a tool of political hegemony and control. ATN-Bangla was the first private TV channel in Bangladesh that ended the 33-year-long monopoly (since 1964) of Bangladesh Television (BTV) on July 15, 1997. Channel-I went on air on October 1, 1999, and Ekushey Television (ETV) started broadcasting on April 14, 2020.

Sheikh Hasina's first government (1996-2001) allowed these three private TV channels to go on air without any political motive or intention to control the country's private TV channels. ATN Bangla and Channel-I are satellite TV channels. ETV has covered every part of the country through its terrestrial facilities. Being the first and only private terrestrial TV channel, ETV successfully exceeded the country's state-controlled only TV channel, BTV, in broadcasting. Imbued with the spirit of Bangladesh's Liberation War, these three private TV channels maintained professional ethics in their news and entertainment programs. Moreover, these channels did not work as mouthpieces for the government and the ruling party. That was a breakthrough in the broadcasting history of the country.

This media-friendly environment continued largely because there were no dos and don'ts instructions from the then-AL government of Sheikh Hasina. This scenario changed when the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) formed a coalition government with three other religion-based parties—Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh, Bangladesh Jatiya Party (Najdur), and Islami Oikya Jote—after winning in the general elections held on October 1, 2001. The four-party alliance government headed by Begum Khaleda Zia of BNP carefully issued private TV licenses to its party colleagues and cronies, violating and brushing aside all existing rules and regulations for launching a private TV channel in Bangladesh. However, "BNP ruled the country from 1991 to 1995 under the premiership of Begum Khaleda Zia. The party did not try using private televisions for their political goal" (Khan and Rahman, 2016, 284).

The BNP-led government issued ten private television channels from 2001 to 2006. Some of these private TV channels managed licenses in a single day. Some channel owners imported equipment for their TV channels without paying customs tariffs and fees to the Bangladesh government. Some channels received their allocated broadcasting frequency from the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) within a week (Khan, 2007; Khan, 2013;

Khan and Rahman, 2016; Khan, 2020). The BNP government used private TV channels as "the pied piper of power" (Khan, 2013; Khan, 2020) to remain in power, by propagating their political ideology through the private TV channels of their political cronies. The tragedy is the BNP allowed ten private TV channels to air at lightning-fast speed (Khan, 2007) and closed down ETV, the most popular and progressive private TV channel, as a political vendetta against Bangladesh Awami League (AL) in 2002. The then leader of the opposition in parliament, Sheikh Hasina vehemently protested against the BNP government's unethical private TV channel licensing procedure. The Awami League assured that if they could form the government, they would wipe out all the irregularities and unethical steps of private TV channel licensing procedures to create a healthy broadcasting environment. Nothing tangible has been done since Bangladesh Awami League formed the government in 2009 after the landslide victory in the general elections held on December 29, 2008. The irony is that the AL followed the BNP government's same path for granting private TV licenses to its party comrades and cronies. Moreover, the AL government permitted 10 private TV channels to air on a single day on October 20, 2009. The AL government permitted two more channels in 2010, four TV channels in 2011, and fourteen other private TV channels in 2013 for broadcasting (Islam, 2013; Rahman, 2017). The AL government of Sheikh Hasina and the fourteen parties' grand alliance follow "the pick and choose" policy to award its political and ideological comrades with private TV channel licenses. Hallin and Papathanassopoulos (2002) described this phenomenon as "Political Clientelism." Khan (2013, 2020) observed that the private TV channels in Bangladesh have been enveloped in the ruling party's power and political tricks since 2001.

The critical political economy of media and communication focuses on how media power molds society's political and economic power. Who benefits from the social and political power structure? How the beneficiaries in the power structure exploit it. It investigates social relations, primarily how communication relations work. Mosco elaborated that this "political economy is not just another approach. It is also a guide to understanding the relationships that prevail among numerous approaches and to the relationships among many aspects of social life" (2009, p.28). The political and economic hegemony of the ruling parties since 2001 has transformed the media as the pet dogs of different apparatuses of the ruling classes like government, bureaucracy, intelligentsia, and the filthy rich people of the country. As the fourth estate, the media, particularly the private television channels in Bangladesh, have been transformed into propaganda tools for the ruling classes. This has given birth to a polluted media environment that is unhealthy for all the democratic institutions of the country. This paper argues that the massive boom of private television channels in Bangladesh cannot be a boon for the country as long as crony capitalists dominate the private television industry with the help of the ruling party. Rather, the boom of private televisions in Bangladesh will be a curse for the society.

Research Questions (RQs)

The paper deals with the following Research Questions (RQs):

RQ 1. What is the political economy behind the private television channel boom in Bangladesh?

RQ 2. How do crony capitalists of the country create political hegemony in support of the ruling party through their private television channels?

RQ 3. How have private television channels been transformed into a propaganda tool for the ruling party?

Literature Review

There is a dearth of academic literature on television operations, especially private television channel ownership in developing countries like Bangladesh. Douglas Kellner, in his book *Television and the Crisis of Democracy* (1990, xiv), tries "to produce a critical theory of television that provides comprehensive perspectives on the system of commercial television in the United States and to develop proposals for reconstructing the medium so as to make it more democratic.. In his argument, Kellner (1990, xiii) thinks that in the recent past, television and the media failed to create "an informed citizenry" by providing necessary information and, at the same time, worked for "the growth of excessive corporate and state power."

Kellner (1990, xiv) argues that this sort of "conglomeratization of television" is a part of the reconstruction of the capitalist system "that has occurred during the transition from an economic order based on industrial and manufacturing to a new high-tech media/information society." Kellner attempts to present a systematic, critically informed political and institutional study of television in the context of American society. He traces television broadcasting history and elaborates on its socioeconomic impact and ongoing political power. He also shows the relationship between television, the state, and business and how each phenomenon benefits the trio. A strong and interdependent relationship exists among these three apparatuses of American society, which ultimately goes against public interest and democracy. Kellner finds that television in a capitalist society like the USA is an apparatus of business and a control tool for practicing power relations and carrying out ideological propaganda in the interest of the powerful.

The first-generation critical theorists of the Frankfurt School (Adorno, 1954; Horkheimer 2002, orig. 1944; Marcuse, 1991, orig. 1964; 1998, orig.1965) interpreted media as the product of cultural industry, which is, in fact, in the grip of the capitalists in the capitalistic society and the means to uphold the bourgeoisie state. " Marcuse saw television as being part of an apparatus of administration and domination in a one-dimensional society" (Kellner, 2006 and 2010, 22).Kellner re-examines Marcuse's theories nearly fifty years later and summed up in *One Dimensional Man* (1964) thus:

In this view, television is an apparatus of manipulation and societal domination. In *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), Marcuse claimed that the inanities of commercial radio and television confirmed his analyses on the individual and the demise of authentic culture and oppositional thought, portraying television as a part of an apparatus producing the thought and

behavior needed for the social and cultural reproduction of contemporary capitalist societies (Kellner, 2006 and 2010, 33).

Jürgen Habermas (1975, 1989; orig. 1962) a second-generation critical theorist of the Frankfurt School, overcame the limitations of the cultural industry theory in media studies by using his bourgeois public sphere theory. He "analyzed the transformation of the public sphere under the pressure of a rising system media" (Kellner, 1990, 11). This bourgeois public sphere consisted of public places like pubs, coffee houses, restaurants, literary salons, and meeting halls where people met to discuss daily and common issues and concerns "to organize against arbitrary and oppressive forms of social and public authority. The public sphere was nurtured by newspapers, journals, pamphlets, and books which were read and discussed in social sites like public pubs and coffee houses" (Kellner and Durham, 2006, xviii).

However, in the late nineteenth century, private corporations became more active in business and politics. They began to take over the press and state to promote their business interest and power. Thus, "the public sphere was transformed from participants in the political and cultural debates into consumers of media images and information" (Kellner, 1990, 12). Kellner termed this phenomenon as the "colonization of the public sphere." "In this conjuncture, the public sphere was colonized by big media, which came to dominate public life and which recast the public sphere from a locus of information and debate to a site of manipulation by corporate powers" (Durham and Kellner, 2006, xix).

Herman and Chomsky (2002) called this domination of private corporations over media and its transformation in Western societies a tool of "Manufacturing Consent" in favor of the ruling elites in a capitalistic society. The corporate media have a strong control and authority over means of communication. Corporate control and domination of the so-called "liberal or conservative media" are the same (Chomsky, 2011, 68). They are part of "large corporations, owned and interlinked with even larger conglomerates."

There is little research on television studies in Bangladesh. The country's media scholars somehow missed the importance of research on television in the country. That's the main reason for the insufficient availability of literature on television. Television studies as an academic discipline was introduced at the university level in 2012. Underscoring the need for television studies at the university level, Professor Dr. A. A. M. S. Arefin Siddique (the then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Dhaka) took the initiative to establish a Department of Television Studies at the University of Dhaka. This is Bangladesh's first department of Television, Film, and Photography. Earlier, a course on television was introduced as an elective course for the master's degree program at the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism of the University of Dhaka. A two-year master's degree program was introduced at the department's initial stage. Now, a four years bachelor's degree with honours and a one-year master's degree program are being offered at the Department of Television, Film, and Photography.

Among the media scholars in Bangladesh, Abdur Razzaque Khan conducted significant research on private television in Bangladesh as a part of his Ph.D. studies at the University of Hong Kong (HKU). This was the first Ph.D. work on private televisions in Bangladesh titled *Private Television Ownership in Bangladesh: A Critical Qualitative Inquiry*. Khan (2013) mainly focuses on private television ownership in Bangladesh. He discovers how the crony capitalists keep a symbiotic relationship with the ruling party and get licenses for their private televisions. Khan explains how the private television channels in Bangladesh have become an integral part of ruling party politics. Without the incumbent party's consent, no one can expect to obtain a license for launching a new private television channel. After a party assumes power, it tries the next day to grant its cronies a handful of licenses to go on the air in violation of all rules and regulations, which is an open secret.

However, the beginning of private televisions in the country was quite promising. The first three channels—ATN Bangla, Channel-I, and ETV—were granted licenses during the AL regime in 1996-2001. Political ownership of private televisions was initiated by the BNP regime on its assumption of power in 2001. Since 2009, the AL government followed the same old path of the BNP's in awarding licenses for private television channels to its own cronies. An intense system of crony capitalism enveloped the licensing climate. The great unwritten law of private television business in the country is the fact that only cronies favored by the ruling party chief (that is, the head of the government) are rewarded with television licenses.

Private television owners in Bangladesh are either businessmen-cum-politicians or politicians-cum-businessmen. Private television owners and the ruling elites of the country live symbiotically. The owners of private television networks enjoy a most favored status for their channels, bringing them up close to ruling party elites, which prompts all other businessmen with right political connections to invest in media houses with private televisions. Khan concludes that unless a comprehensive policy for regulating private television channels is formulated, this all-important mass media will not help Bangladesh's democratization process at all; on the contrary, it is most likely to continue threatening democracy with all dire consequences already at the door.

Anis Rahman (2017) conducted the second Ph.D. level research on private television in Bangladesh at Simon Fraser University in Canada. His Ph.D. thesis, titled *Television Journalism, Market-Oriented, and Media Democratization in Bangladesh*, explores the emergence of the private television industry in Bangladesh and its relation with the neo-liberal market-oriented media system of the country, which has a significant impact on private television news production and broadcast policy making. Following Khan's (2013) path, Rahman (2017) examined the private television ownership structure and how politics has polluted the licensing procedures of the private television channels in Bangladesh. Rahman terms this relation between the country's *nouveau riches* and the elites of the ruling party as a "politico-commercial nexus". He describes the scenario:

It shows that with the rapid growth of private television channels and online media, state-administered television in Bangladesh is faced with a higher pressure of political

instrumentalization and advertising dependency. ... It is evident that there is a mutual relationship between the ownership of television channels and the ways in which news are produced and commodified within an urban-centric, exploitative, and gendered division of labor (2017, ix).

Rahman (2022) completed the third Ph.D. level research on private television in Bangladesh at the Queensland University of Technology in Australia. The title of his Ph.D. thesis is *Private Television Channels in Bangladesh: A Political Economy Analysis of the Role of the State and How This Impacts News Media*. Like Khan, Rahman carried out his research within the theoretical framework of the political economy of media and communication. He identified the roles of the different stakeholders of the private television industry in Bangladesh—the owners, the state, and a group of corrupt journalists who are responsible for the polluted atmosphere in the country's private television industry. He also reveals that different media laws, regulations, partisan licensing procedures, threats, and physical attacks on journalists squeeze the public sphere role of the private television media.

The Theoretical Framework of the Study

Media, power, and politics are inextricably intertwined with each other. Mass media have been a substantial part and parcel of the power and political cycle in all societies. Thus, both critical theory and the critical political economy of media/communication have been applied as the theoretical framework of this study. Moreover, the media itself is a powerful apparatus in any society. How do the media work in a society? Who owns the media? All these are core concerns and issues of critical theory and the critical political economy of media/communication. Critical theory is a holistic method of understanding and explaining any social problem or phenomenon with an emancipatory approach (Khan, 2020). Khan (2013) elaborates that critical inquiry focuses on the power relationships in a given society and how hegemonic forces and injustice work. Critical theory examines societal exploitation, inequality, and injustice and how these phenomena are shaped and exercised in a society within a holistic canvas. Bronner (2011, 1-2) explains that "critical theory was always concerned not merely with how things were but how they might be and should be."

Emanating from critical theory, the Critical Political Economy (CPE) framework of media/communication critiques capitalism's "claims about itself and sustained empirical investigations of how its everyday operations perpetuated exploitation and injustice, manufactured inequalities, and undermined mutuality and solidarity" (Wasko et al., 2011, .2). The CPE of media/communication investigates how social relations, mainly power relations, are constructed and exercised in a communication situation. As Mosco (2009, 2) elaborates, "*political economy is the study of social relations, particularly the power relations, that mutually constitute the production, distribution, and consumption of resources, including communication resources.*" He further explains that the political economy of communication is "*the study of control and survival in social life*" (Mosco, 2009; 3). Hardy (2014) explains the media's CPE by raising the question of who owns the media. Media represent whom and how? Who has access to media? What is the

power relation between the media and the state? The CPE of media takes an altruistic and pro-people stand in society. As Hardy (2014, 14) explains the very nature of the critical political economy of media:

How do media relate to power sources in society? Whose interests are represented? Who is represented in Media? Who has access to communication resources – and what can they do with them? Political economy argues that to answer such questions we need not only the analysis of texts, or texts and readers, but analysis of the forces and interests shaping media and the condition of production. How you judge political economy will depend on how you view the focus of investigation – the questions it poses and tries to answer. It will also depend on whether you share perspectives that insist there are 'problems' in our media systems and whether you are persuaded it is important to examine these problems and consider how to try to put them right. *Critical political economy of communications is a critical realist approach that investigates problems connected with the political and economic organisation of communication resources."*

Research Methodology and Methods

The study follows a qualitative approach to explore and examine the structure of private television ownership in Bangladesh. The author himself collected data and analyzed it by using two methods.

1. A total of 25 semi-structured in-depth interviews of 25 persons/stakeholders of the private television industry in Bangladesh were conducted. The stakeholders at the time were senior television journalists (Director of News and Chief News Editors (CNEs)), owners and Chief Executive Officers (CEOs), and Managing Directors (MDs) of the private television channels, policymakers (Information Secretary, Information Minister of the country) media scholars, and program chiefs of private television channels. All 25 persons willingly participated in interviews and expressed their views without any pressure from the management of their channels or the government.

2. The secondary data were gathered from published government documents, such as government acts and gazettes published from time to time since Bangladesh's independence, and from newspaper reports and video clips of private television programs.

The author used thematic analysis to analyze data from transcripts. The data analysis started with key concepts like private television channels, ownership of private television channels, TV journalists, licensing procedures, political party, ruling elites and party, BNP, AL, cronyism, cronies, crony capitalism, the democratization of media, and so on. The author found more varied concepts like political ownership of private televisions, fabrication and misuse of existing rules and regulations, and political domination through open coding. Using open coding, the author developed categories and then identified the themes for analysis from the categories. All the interviews were conducted from 2009 to 2023 at different times. The author first conducted the interviews as part of his PhD study, and later on, he sat with the interviewees at times to get updated data on private television scenarios of the country.

The epistemological stand of this study is constructionism, which describes how truth or meaning comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world (Crotty, 1998, 8). There can never be a meaning without a mind. Meaning cannot be discovered; it is a constructing process. People construct different meanings of the same phenomenon.

Methodology explains how the research design is carried out by using particular methods and linking them to the desired outcome (Crotty, 1998, 7). It is not merely the description of the methodology, but rather an account of choosing methods "and the particular forms in which the methods are employed" (Crotty, 1998, 7). In line with the critical theory and critical political economy of media and communication, this study's theoretical perspective follows critical inquiry as its methodology.

The Emergence and Transformation of Private TV Channels in Bangladesh

In today's Bangladesh, "television is the most popular medium" (Rahman, 2012, 86). Television is also "the most trusted source of news and information" (Kellner, 1990, 2) in Bangladesh society. The emergence of private television has opened up new windows for people to get more information about Bangladesh and the world from various sources. Private television has created a hunger for news among people from different walks of life.

Because of the prevalence of the high illiteracy rate (about 50%) in Bangladesh, television, besides radio, is the medium of choice for the population at large. Even the majority of the educated section prefers to spend more time watching television than reading newspapers or tuning in to the radio (A. Khan, 2007, 131)

In the post-1990s, after the fall of General Ershad's autocratic regime, a significant change was noticed in the nature of journalism in Bangladesh. In the post-1990s, political journalism was replaced by objective journalism. Later in the mid of 1990s, objective journalism was replaced by corporate journalism. This phenomenon first occurred in the print medium and later in the electronic media in private television and private radio. Now journalism in Bangladesh has a corporate structure (Haq, 2011a, 2011b; A. Khan, 2007; Khan, 2006; Newton, 2003; A. Rahman, 2009; Rahman, 2012). Private television journalism has been practicing and advocating corporate journalism since its emergence in 1997:

These Channels are totally dependent on the advertisement market, and as a part of corporate branding, they have sold all of their news slots to advertisers. To get their stakes from the competitive advertisement market, they have made their news slot cheaper. The broadcast channels are submerged in the corporate journalism created by the print media (Haq, 2011b, 201)

Transmission of regular television programs started in the West in the 1940s, but people in Bangladesh could experience it via the government only in 1964. The erstwhile Pakistan Television started broadcasting its black-and-white transmission from Dhaka on December 25, 1964. Earlier, the first government of BNP's Begum Khaleda Zia (1996-2001) adopted an open

sky policy regarding the reception of foreign satellite television programs through dish antennas in 1992, with the legalization of the Television Receive Only Dish [TVRO] (Wahid, 2007). Though ATN Bangla ended BTV's monopoly as a private satellite television channel in 1997, the TVRO of the open sky policy ended BTV's monopoly as a strong entertainment medium. "Although the state-regulated BTV was the dominant medium of entertainment for prolonged twenty-eight years (1964-1992), its monopoly ended with the penetration of STV in 1992" (Huda, 2005, 178).

After the independence of Bangladesh, former Pakistan Television was renamed "Bangladesh Television" (BTV) by presidential order number 115, issued on September 15, 1972 and published in the Bangladesh Gazette (J. Chowdhury, 1989, 14). "One of the first acts of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's government was to end television's status as a public corporation, notional though it had been, and to bring it under direct political control" (Page and Crawley, 2001, 57). Since the beginning BTV has been part of authoritarianism in the sense that the government of Bangladesh controlled and used BTV for political purposes. The two army dictators, General Zia ur Rahman and General Ershad, skillfully used television with other media outlets "to project their own personalities and the role of the army in national life, whether in digging canals or rescuing the victims of perennial floods. This reinforced the process of centralization and politicization of media, which had begun earlier" (Page and Crawley, 2001, 57).

Strong political connection with the ruling party appeared to be one of the main conditions for getting a private television license in Bangladesh. Each of the journalists, private TV channel owners, and policymakers the researcher interviewed listed the political lobby and consideration as a major category for getting private TV licenses. Khan (2013) found that it was revealed that ruling political party elites (like influential ministers, members of the parliaments (MPs), high party profiles, and senior party leaders) were directly involved with some private television channel management during Khaleda Zia's second regime (2001-2006). Media ownership and its control by the ruling elites are always political issues in all societies. Political power is manipulated to give the ruling party cronies private television licenses. Herman and McChesney (1997) explain this phenomenon:

The social and political power associated with control over the media has been recognized from the very dawn of publishing; in all societies the questions of who owns and controls the media, and for what purposes, have been political issues (Herman & McChesney, 1997, 11).

Explaining how political lobbies worked to get licenses in the ruling party, senior journalist Syed Istaquer Reza, editor-in-chief and CEO of Global TV, explains this phenomenon in this way:

They (the then ruling party BNP) gave licenses with political consideration to its political men...Their motive was to keep their control over TV propaganda...Their motive was to use the TV for their political interest. They did it with the intention to curb the opposition party's voice. They (BNP) closed down a popular TV channel (ETV), which was the victim of their political jealousy (Interview with Syed Istiaquer Reza on June 2, 2009, and talked to the researcher several times in 2020-2023).

During the regime of the BNP-led religion-based four party alliance government, ten private television channel licenses were given to BNP cronies, violating all existing rules and regulations. The *Daily Star* made the first lead of the daily on March 16, 2007, with the headline "10 TV Channels Licenses available in lightning fast speed" of an in-depth investigative and interpretative report. The report says, "Ten private satellite television channels, all owned or backed by leading BNP figures including former ministers, received their licenses at lightning speed during the last BNP-led government's rule, taking advantage of weak government regulations" (A. W. Khan, 2007: Front Page).

The BNP-led four-party government gave licenses to former Dhaka-10 MP Mosaddeq Ali Falu, who was former private secretary to former prime minister Begum Khaleda Zia and owner of nTV; Channel 1 of Khaleda Zia's elder son Tareq Zia's close aide Giasuddin Al Mamun, RTV of Falu; BNP leader and Dhaka City Mayor Sadeque Hossain Khola (the man behind the channel Bangla Vision); Baishakhi TV of former public works minister Mirza Abbas. In fact, Mirza Abbas was the man behind the channel Islamic TV of Khaleda Zia's younger brother and former BNP MP Major (Rtd) Sayeed Iskandar and SNTV of former BNP MPs Salauddin Ahmed and Nasiruddin Ahmed Pintu. Dinganta TV of the religion-based party Jamaat-e-Islam and Focus TV of Khaleda Zia's former adviser and BNP MP Salauddin Quadser Chowdhury were allowed to go on air within a very short time (A. W. Khan, 2007).

Manzurul Ahsan Bulbul, a senior journalist, believes that the former ruling alliance of the BNP initiated the politicization of licensing procedures for private television channels. They did not follow any rules and regulations or invite any tender for giving private TV licenses. Bulbul (2009) elaborates on the phenomenon:

The reason for such type of politicization of licensing process was simply to strengthen their political power for an infinite period. In 2001, when BNP and its four party alliances went to power after the election, they did two things relating to the country's private television channels. First, they gave licenses to their party people and ideological comrades, and second, they took measures against the pro-liberation war private television channels. ETV was the victim of this policy (Interview with Manzurul Ahsan Bulbul on June 14, 2009, and several times from 2018-2023).

Ekushey Television (ETV) was Bangladesh's first terrestrial private television channel. It became the voice of the people and the most popular television channel in Bangladesh's history through its news and other innovative and creative programs. ETV's news was one of the most popular programs on television. People from all walks of life enjoyed ETV's reports with complete trust and confidence. Earlier, Bangladeshis depended on the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) radio Bangla service for objective news. Within a short time, ETV replaced BBC with its news reports, which have had full credibility since their transmission. Imbued with the spirit of Bangladesh's Liberation War, ETV maintained its professionalism and did not compromise with any pressure in its broadcasting spirit and ideology. ETV's broadcasting policy and on-air

programs went against some political parties' religion-based ideology. As a result, some political forces were annoyed with the ETV.

In its election manifesto in the 2001 national election, the BNP declared that it would close down ETV if it were to assume power. ETV was closed down on August 27 2002. A fraud charge was brought against its Managing Director (MD) Simon Dring and three other executives. Later on, Dring's visa and work permit were canceled. According to Manzurul Ahsan Bulbul, "That was the beginning of the dirty and nasty politics of private television channels in Bangladesh "(Interview with Manzurul Ahsan Bulbul on May 18, 2009); "This politicization process of private television channels was initiated by the former ruling party Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and its alliance." The journalist also said this private television channel politicization process had two dynamics. The first was to close the channels operating against the ruling party ideology as permitted during the previous Awami League 1996-2001 government regime. The second was to give license to their political cronies to consolidate their power for good. Bulbul also went on:

That's why they gave licenses to 10 channels within a short period of time without following any rules and regulations. The BNP government propagated that ETV was closed as its tender process was faulty. But in their time, they didn't even call any tender to give licenses for their channels. Because they thought ETV's license procedures were faulty, it was better not to follow any tender process to avoid fault. (Interview with Manzurul Ahsan Bulbul on 20 June 2009).

They were blind, deaf, and dumb owing to their political rivalry towards any positive change in the country's private television sector. "The BNP-Jamaat alliance government stopped the tender calling process in distributing licenses. That was the beginning of anarchy in giving private television license. Political loyalty and lobbying have become the only criterion for private television licenses (Bulbul, 2010).

Supporting journalist Bulbul's statement, Abdul Kalam Azad, MP, the then Information Minister of the AL government, thinks:

BNP-led four-party alliance government gave private TV licenses to its party men, brushing asides all rules and regulations with political motivation to win the election....But it didn't work in the election in 2001..People rejected them because of their dirty politics and corruption in all spheres of life...Only political lobbyists of the BNP got licenses during their regime. (Interview with Abul Kalam Azad on June 27 2009).

The former Information Secretary thought that politics and power relations could not be ignored in the country's private television sector. Media is a tool of politics. "Whoever is in charge, he or she has to compromise with the ruling political party. You cannot go beyond the power relation phenomenon" (Interview with Dr. Kamal Abdul Naser Chowdhury on June 18, 2009).

Political consideration was the main criterion for getting any private TV license during the last BNP-led four-party ruling alliance. A senior journalist of the country (and the former adviser of the former premier Khaleda Zia) said "the BNP government gave licenses to their political comrades. However, the license holders were not that much enlightened about running these TV channels. So in the long run, some sold their licenses to others" (Interview with Shaukat Mahmud

July 19, 2009). The managing director of a popular private television channel, who is also an MP of the present ruling party AL, informed the author that they bought the TV license from its past owner, who is involved with BNP politics. However, former late AL MP Israfil Alam (in a parliamentary member meeting held on November 20, 2011 with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in the chair) informed that those who got private television licenses from the present AL government sold their licenses to BNP-Jamaat People (Ahmed & Hassan, 2011). This indicates that the owners managed licenses through political lobbies; but, some owners sold the licenses to their opposite party. BNP men sold licenses to AL men, and AL men sold out to BNP people.

Describing the private television scenario in Bangladesh, Zayadul Ahsan Pintu, one of the brilliant journalists and editor of DBC, elaborates the scenario:

In Bangladesh ruling party wants to control the media for political interest. The former ruling alliance thought they would get maximum benefit for their political interest since the ministers, MPs, and senior party leaders owned private TVs (Interview with Zyadul Ahsan Pintu on June 12 2009 and March 16 2020).

Members of parliament (MPs), ministers, and senior ruling party leaders were directly or indirectly involved with almost all the private television channels that got licenses during the premiership of Begum Khaleda Zia of BNP. It took a year for Channel-I and ETV to get their licenses before BNP came to power in 2001. In an interview with the *Daily Star* Channel I Director, Shaikh Siraj said, "It took us over a year to get the license. We had to go through several different stages of the application process" (A. W. Khan, 2007).

During the BNP regime, nTV of Mosaddeq Ali Falu got a license from the Information Ministry within eighteen days in 2004. Channel-1 of Giasuddin Al Mamun got a license within twenty-six days in 2005. BNP-linked nTV, Channel-1, and RTV "received their licenses without being discussed in an inter-ministerial meeting, normally a precondition for receiving a private television license under the government rules of business" (A. W. Khan, 2007).

Political ideology is the main criterion for getting a license. All the private TV channels in Bangladesh are somehow inclined to the political ideology of the ruling parties. Private televisions in Bangladesh still depend on the patronization of the political government. Nobody can get licenses or no objection certificates (NOCs) without direct involvement with the government. This deprives many businessmen interested in investing in this sector (Abdullah, 2008).

Media industries have a moral obligation toward society. Are today's media discharging that obligation to society and the people? It seems that "media industries were invested in order to gain profits irrespective of questions of value" (Stevenson, 1999, 2). Values and moral obligations of media industries have been replaced by profit and only profit. Media work as the organ and the mouthpiece of the existing power structure. This is largely because it has become common for business conglomerates or large business groups to invest in media businesses like newspapers or television channels. This trend has been vividly noticed in today's Bangladesh media scenario since the 1990s. Most major newspapers and TV channels are part of large business conglomerates.

Having found the media business as a solid weapon to protect their business interests and control the country's politics and power, most modern merchants and business tycoons have turned to the media world. But, unfortunately, this has given birth to a polluted media environment, which is pro-power and pro-elite and cannot protect the interest of the voiceless in our society. Islam (2002) has sketched out the situation thus:

Media in the hands of merchants or business tycoons can hardly become the voice of the grassroots. South Asian countries follow a capitalist ideology, but capitalism is only crony capitalism here, where the disparity between the elite and the lower strata of society is widening. Media, in the hands of a few merchants, over and over again find themselves playing dualism. They maintain elite opinion but being complacent about its so-called normative role in society (Islam, 2002).

Private TV channels in Bangladesh are not an exception to this phenomenon, although the beginning of private TV channels was auspicious and professional. In the first phase, three private television channels—ATN Bangla, Channel I, and ETV—continued to uphold objective journalism in their news reports and entertainment programs. Corporate journalism replaced this objective journalism during the second regime of Khaleda Zia (2001-2006). Qadir (2023, 203) explains this situation: "the BNP-Jamaat government in quick succession approved licenses of their own men with NTV becoming the first to succeed ETV, where most staffs of the shut station were employed" . He further explains, "the process continues with a large number of cable televisions already on air, and more are in the queue." Crony capitalism replaced objective TV journalism to a great extent.

A symbiotic relationship between the crony capitalist and the government emerged in the private television sector. Khan (2013 and 2020) and Khan and Rahman (2016) examined the relationship between crony capitalism and the boom of private television channels. They found that most private TV channels strongly connected with the crony capitalists in Bangladesh. This symbiotic relationship works as a bar for working journalists. The journalists can hardly make reports on any issue that goes against the interest of owners and the ruling party elites. The owners of the approved televisions sometimes use their channels for power, prestige, and privilege and to protect their business (Khan, 2013).

The Political Economy of the Private Television Channel Boom in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is the first case of "the TV media boom trend "(Rahman, 2009) among South Asian countries. The unprecedented growth of private TV channels has caught the attention of scholars (Abdur Khan, 2009, 2013, 2020; Khan and Habiba, 2016; Atiqur Rahman and Alam, 2014; Anis, Rahman, 2009, 2012, 2017, 2020, 2022; Atiqur Rahman, 2022;Atiqur Rahman and Habiba 2023). This growth of private TV strongly connects with the country's political elites and crony capitalists. Finding private TV channels is an easy way to connect with the ruling elites and make money transparently. The business conglomerates choose to invest in the private TV sector. New

communication technologies in the 1990s paved the way for the mushroom growth of private TV channel expansion, which has "transformed the television landscape resulting in exponential growth in the number of private television" (Rahman, 2012, 84). The private television industry in Bangladesh prioritizes profit-making "through entertainment and political partisanship, ignoring the dark realities of a poor country" (Atiqur Rahman and Alam, 2014).

Scholars find a symbiotic relationship between the media boom and crony capitalism in different parts of the world. The crony capitalists backup the ruling elites in an informal way, and in exchange they get enormous political and financial support from the ruling elites to expand their business outlets and media organization. The studies on post-Soviet Russia (Gerasimov, 1998; Hoffman, 1997; Sharafutdinova, 2010), Latin America (Fox and Waisbord, 2002; Haber, 2002; D. C. Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, 2002), Mexico (Hughes and Lawson, 2004), Uruguay (Faraone, 2002), Indonesia (Krishna and Hill, 2000, 2011; Krishna and Lee, 2008) and South Korea and the Philippines (Kang, 2002) show "how ruling party's politics and crony capitalism are intertwined with each other and work with the media in these societies" (Khan and Rahman, 2016, 281).

Haber (2002) concluded that crony capitalism is an inefficient system in the Latin American context and "goes hand in hand with corruption" (Haber, 2002, xv). Only a few people who are very "close to the political authorities who make and enforce policies receive favors that have large economic value" (Haber, 2002, xii). "Crony capitalism is not only an economic issue somewhat; it is very much related to politics, democracy, and a country's electoral system" (Khan and Rahman, 2016, 282). It is an aesthetic and sophisticated form of corruption between the political and economic elites. Both groups are benefited from each other. "In cronyism, public officials use their power to help and protect their families, friends, colleagues, supporters, and all their near and dear ones outside the government" (Abdur Khan and Rahman, 2016, 282).

Polish sociologist Adam Podgórecki (1987) described this network between the political and the business elites as "Dirty Togetherness" (Podgórecki, 2017, 161). It is an artificial and informal friendship based on mutual blackmail in a totalitarian ruling system "(Khan and Rahman, 2016, 282). The relationship between the *nouveau riche*¹ "maintains a close connection with political elites to get and keep their privileges. In return, public offices political elites get their strong support to control rule-making and rule the country" (Khan and Rahman, 2016, 282).

Russian scholar Sharafutdinova (2010) called this *nouveau riche* group "Economic and Political Networks (EPN)," an informal and personal network that plays a significant role in ruling

¹ The term *nouveau-riche* is a derogatory term meant to mock people who have a lot of money but do not have the good taste to spend it in a "classy" way. The implication is that it is more socially acceptable to inherit money and the long traditions that go with it than to become wealthy suddenly. *Nouveau-riche*, "new rich" in French, dates from 1813, but the idea goes back to the ancient Greek concept of *neo-ploutos*. Retrieved from ><https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/nouveau-riche>.

society. Explaining the nature of EPN in Russian society, Sharafutdinova shows how the Russian president, governor, political parties, members of parliament, individual politicians, and business people are involved with the EPNs (Khan and Rahman, 2016). She also suggests that one should take a more individualist approach to studying the dynamics of these EPNs. The EPN "is an informal institutional arrangement through which elite groups compete for power and wealth. These networks represent a crucial informal power resource" (Sharafutdinova, 2010, 39). It is also a route through which "resources are exchanged, information is obtained, and collaborative actions are planned" (Easter, 2000, 11). In post-Soviet Russia, these EPNs started to form under Mikhail Gorbachev's reform programs. It flourished during President Boris Yeltsin's regime and took deep roots in Russian society during Vladimir Putin's period. In post-Soviet Russia, the members of EPNs invested a significant part of their capital in the media sector to protect their business empires.

Bangladesh experienced massive growth in the private television industry in the late 1990s. Information and Broadcasting Minister Dr. Hasan Mahmud (2019) informed the house in a question-reply session to the parliament that the government permitted forty-five television channels, and thirty of them are on air. When the first Caretaker Government of Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed annulled all the black laws related to newspaper publication in 1991, the corporate houses started investing in newspapers and other media outlets in the country. This annulment restored press freedom in the country to a great extent and paved the way for the business community to invest in the media sector. Private television channels confer power, prestige, proximity to the ruling elites, prominence, and profit to the owners. It is like Five in One. This is one of the main reasons for the business conglomerates to have a private television channel of their own.

The country's noted poet, author, and journalist Abu Hasan Shahriar thinks the media can protect a businessperson from other troubles or disturbances from every quarter in Bangladesh society. In addition, it adds a status quo to the owner and the publisher. Capitalizing on this, the owner or the publisher tries to do power practice to increase their power, position, and even wealth negatively. Abu Hasan Shahriar (2004) puts it this way (translation from Bangla to English by the author himself) :

In earlier days, the rich man used to pet dogs to watch and guard his wealth; now, that rich man pets a Daily. A Daily in the twenty-first century is an obedient dog at the rich man's house. Sometimes, its master incites it here and there. The Daily is used to owning land and business (p. 32).

Riaz and Rahman (2021) identified three factors in media ownership and concentration in Bangladesh. Big business groups owned most of the media outlets. The owners of these media houses are directly or indirectly very close to the political elites and ruling party, and they have a political identity. The members of the same families control many businesses and media outlets. Anis Rahman (2020) found that competition between two rival political parties is one of the main

factors in Bangladesh's abnormal growth of private television channels. The two major political parties, BNP and AL, use political power to issue private television licenses to their party men in an informal way to cement their political power. Scholars (Andaleeb and Rahman, 2015; Rahman, Reza, and Haq 2017; Anis Rahman, 2020) call it a "politico-commercial nexus." Anis Rahman puts it this way :

This nexus is a complex relationship of mutually interdependent interests and interlocking networks between high-level political leaders, media owners, advertisers, and top-tier industrial conglomerates. The nexus elucidates the fluid nature of political leadership and its internal meshing with commerce. The nexus transcends rigid ideological division among dominant political parties. In Bangladesh, informal relations are now institutionalized through the domination of political and commercial elites who, on one hand, own television and, on the other, influence media policy (2020, .6).

A glance at the private television channels in Bangladesh gives an idea of how the television boom and crony capitalism work together hand in hand.

Table 1: Television in Bangladesh (since 1965) State Owned:

SL.No	Name	Genre	Launching Year	Approving Regime and Owner	Present Status
1.	BTV (Bangladesh Television)	General	December 25 1964. Founded in 1964 as Pakistan Television and renamed BTV after 1971	East Pakistan Bangladesh Government	On air
2.	BTV Chottogram	General	December 19 1996	Bangladesh Awami League (AL) Regional Channel	On Air
3..	Sangsad TV	Live	January 25 2011	AL Bangladesh Government (Broadcast live Bangladesh's National Parliament Assemblies)	On Air

Table 2: Privately Owned TV in Bangladesh (First AL Regime 1997-2000)

Sl.No.	Name	Genre	Launching Year	Approving Regime and Owner	Present Status
5.	ATN Bangla (Bangladesh's first privately owned TV channel)	General	July 15 1997	AL / Multimedia Production Company Ltd.	On Air
6.	Channel i	General	October 1 1999	AL/ Impress Group	On Air
7.	Ekushey Television (ETV is the first terrestrial TV. BNP Government Shut down in 2002 but returned to satellite TV in 2007.)	General	April 14 2000	AL/ S Alam Group of Industries	On Air

Table 3: Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami Coalition Regime (2001-2006). 10 New Private TV and 1 state-owned satellite channels.

	Name	Genre	Launching Year	Approving Regime and Owner	Present Status
8.	NTV (International Television Ltd.)	General	July 3 2003	BNP /Mosaddek Ali Falu	On Air
9.	RTV (National Television Ltd.)	General	December 26 2005	BNP/ Bengal Media Corporation/ Earlier, Mosaddek Ali Falu was the owner.	On Air
10	BTV World	General	April 11 2004	BNP/ Bangladesh Government	On Air
11.	Channel 1 (One Entertainment Ltd.)	General	January 24 2006	BNP	AL Government Shutdown on April 27 2010
12.	Boishakhi TV	General	December 27 2005	BNP/ Destiny 2000 Ltd. Formerly owned by BNS Group of Companies.	On Air
13.	Bangla Vision	General	March 31 2006	BNP	On Air

				Shyamol Bangla Media Ltd.	
14.	CBS News	24/7 News	April 9 2007	BNP/ Tareque Zia's close friend Mamum	Caretaker Government Shutdown the Channel on September 6 2007
15.	Jamuna TV	24/7News	April 5 2014 But License was given in 2006	BNP Jamuna Group	On Air
16.	Diganta TV	General	August 28 2008 The license was issued in 2006	BNP/ (Diganta Media Corporation Ltd.)	AL Government closed down on May 6 2013
17.	Islamic TV	Specialty (Religion)	April 2007	BNP/ Late Said Iskandar, brother of Begum Khadela Zia	AL Government closed down the Channel in May 2013
18	Desh TV	General	NOC was issued in 2006 and launched in 2008	BNP/ Desh Television Ltd. AL MP Saber Hossain Chowdhury is the owner of the Channel.	On Air The Channel was previously a mixed entertainment channel; on October 26 2022, it became a 24-hour news channel.

Table 4: Second Bangladesh Awami League Regime (2008-2013): 31 private satellite TV channels

	Name	Genre	Launching Year	Approving Regime and Owner	Present Status
19.	My TV	General	April 15 2010	AL/ VM International Ltd.	On Air
20.	Bijoy TV	General	December 16 2011	AL/ Bojoy Television Ltd.	On Air

				The former Mayor of Chottogram CC was the owner of this Channel.	
21.	ATN News	24/7 News	June 7 2010	AL/ Multimedia Production Company Ltd.	On Air (First contemporary news channel in Bangladesh.
22.	Mohona TV	General	11 November 2010	AL/ Mohona Television Ltd.	On Air
23.	Somoy TV	24/7 News	April 17 2011	AL/ City Group	On Air
24.	Maasranga	General	July 30 2011	AL/ Square Group	On Air
25.	Independent TV	24/7 News	July 28 2011	AL/ BEXIMCO GROUP	On Air
26.	Channel 9	General	April 8 2011	AL/ Virgo Media Ltd.. General Syed Shafayetul Islam, brother of former GS of AL late Syed Ashraful Islam	On Air

Table 4 – **Continued:** Second Bangladesh Awami League Regime (2008-2013): 31 private satellite TV channels

	Name	Genre	Launching Year	Approving Regime and Owner	Present Status
27.	GTV	General	12 June 2012	AL/ Gazi Group AL MP Gazi Golam Dastagir	On Air
28.	71 TV	24/7 News	June 21, 2012	AL/ Meghna Group of Industries. Pro-AL journalist Mozammel Babu is one of the owners and MD of the Channel.	

29.	SATV	General	January 19, 2013	AL/ Salauddin Ahmed is the owner of the Channel	On Air
30.	Channel 24	24/7 News	May 24 2012	AL/ Times Media Ltd. Pro-AL businessman A K Azad is the owner of the Channel.	On Air
31.	Channel 16	Specialty (Music)	December 16, 2011	AL/ Insight Telecast Company Ltd.	The Channel was shut down on December 2, 2014
32.	Asian TV	General	January 18, 2013	AL/ Asian Group of Industries	On Air

Table 4 – **Continued:** Second Bangladesh Awami League Regime (2013-2023):

	Name	Genre	Launching Year	Approving Regime and Owner	Present Status
33.	Gaan Bangla TV	Specialty (Music)	December 16, 2013	AL/ Birds Eye Mass Media & Communication Ltd. A concern of One More Zero Group	On Air First Full HD music channel in Bangladesh
34.	Depto TV	General	December 12, 2015	AL/ Kazi Media Ltd., a sister concern of Kazi Farms Limited	On Air
35.	Green TV	General	May 9, 2023	AL/ Rangdhanu Group	On Air
36.	DBC News	General	January 21, 2016	AL/ Dhaka BanlaMedia and Communication Ltd. One of the owners is Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, who is the media adviser	On Air

				to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.	
37.	News24	24/7News	July 28, 2016	AL/ Bashundhara Group and East West Media Group	On Air
38.	Ekhon TV	Business related Programmes	June 9 2022	AL/ City Group	On Air
39	Nagorrik TV	General	March 1 2018	AL/ Jadoo Media Ltd. Owned by Anisul Huq of Mohammadi Group. Mr. Anisul was a AL leader and DCC Mayor. His brother Abu Belal Mohammad Shafiqul Haq was the chief of Bangladesh Army during 2015-2018	On Air
40.	Global TV	Entertainment and News	June 30 2022	AL/ Global Multimedia Ltd. Mamunur Rashid Kiron, an MP of ruling AL owned the channel	On Air
41.	Duronto TV	Children	October 5, 2017	AL/ Barind Media Lit.	On Air
42.	Nexus Television	Infotainment and non-fiction Channel	July 30 2021	AL// S Alam Group of Industries. A sister concern of ETV	On Air
43.	Bangla TV	General	May 19 2017 in Bangladesh	AL/ Owned by Firoze Khan	On Air
44.	T-Sports	Sports	November 9 2020	East West Media Group	On Air

Table 5: Upcoming Channels

	Name	Genre	Launching Year	Approving Regime and Owner	Present Status
45.	New Vision TV	General	--	AL	Processing
46.	Renaissance TV	Specialty (Children)	--	AL	Processing
47.	Rangdhabu TV	General	--	AL	Processing
48.	Cambrian TV	Specialty (Education)	--	AL	Processing
49.	Jadu TV	General	--	AL / Jadu Media	Processing
50.	Amar Gaan	Speciality (Music)	---	AL/ Media Bangladesh Ltd.	Processing
52.	Channel 21	General	---	AL/ Broadcast World Ltd.	Processing
53.	Channel 52	General	---	AL	Processing
54.	Amar TV	--	--	AL	Processing
55.	Citizen TV	---	--	AL	Processing
56.	Khela TV	Specialty (Sports)	--	AL	Processing
57.	Prime TV	--	--	AL	Processing
58.	TV Today	--	---	AL	Processing
59.	Utshab TV	---	---	---	Processing

Table 6: Defunct TV Channel

Sl. No.	TV Channel	Launched	Closed
1.	Channel 1	January 24, 2006	April 27, 2010
2.	CSB News	April 9, 2007	September 6, 2007
3.	Islamic TV	April 2007	May 2013
4.	Dignata TV	August 28, 2008	May 6, 2013
5.	Channel 16	December 16, 2011	December 2, 2014
6.	STV-US	November 22, 2005	September 2007

Source of television list: Anis Rahman (2017), Atiqur Rahman (2022), Khan (2013 and 2020), and personal communication with TV journalists and other stakeholders of private television channels and Wikipedia.

The beginning of the private television chapter was a unique journey toward media democratization in Bangladesh. During Khaleda Zia's 2nd regime (2001-2006), the private television ownership pattern turned towards conglomeration and consolidated forms from a non-conglomeration and a non-consolidated form of ownership. Private television ownership was non-consolidated, and licenses were given "on an *ad hoc* basis at the discretion of political parties" (Anis Rahman, 2020, p.15). Anis further goes on:

With the growth of conglomeration in the media industry, the television has become a site of corporate financialization, in which government remains the key enforcer of political power. Intriguingly, all the companies received their licenses from the Awami League regime. This indicates that the Awami League, as the ruling political party of the hybrid regime, has an elaborate alliance with the richest domestic conglomerates and are forging a unique form of politico-commercial power" (2020, 15).

Conclusion

Despite all its limitations, private television is a success story in Bangladesh's media history. More than two decades have passed since a mushroom growth in the number of private televisions. The start was a new and good one in the media history of Bangladesh. Later, the media conglomerate enveloped the growth of private TV channels. This growth is very much related to the ruling party elites and leaders. Without the incumbent party's consent, no one can expect to obtain a license to launch a new private television channel. The ruling party decides who will get the permission; that is an open secret. Now, no one can think of having a private TV channel without the support of a conglomerate. This phenomenon in the boom of private TV channels results from the relationship between crony capitalism and the government and ruling party. Unless a comprehensive policy for regulating private television channels is formulated, this all-important mass media will not help Bangladesh's democratization process; on the contrary, it will most likely continue threatening democracy with all dire consequences already at the door.

Note: This paper is based on the author's Ph.D. thesis and post-PhD research. The Human Research Ethics Committee for Non-Clinical Faculties of the University of Hong Kong (HKU), Hong Kong, approved this study's data collection and interview procedures.

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