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AUTONOMY: KEY TO THE SURVIVAL OF PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING

By

SYED SALAHUDDIN ZAKI

Paper No. 13
The connotative meaning of autonomy transcends the meaning confined in normal lexicons. The word has embodied various deeper significance with the progress of time. The socio-political history of man’s quest for democracy time to time shaped, reshaped the deeper significance of the word. The growth and spread of technology in human life also had considerable influence on the word. It is no longer a mere word - it is a dynamic concept deeply embedded in our contemporary socio-political complexities of life.

The word, as a concept, is always subject to interpretative inquest. Where there is a scope of subjective interpretation, there is always an associated fear of confusion and in confusion thrives motivated human will to use, abuse and exploit.

Let me not delve more on the word autonomy before such angust audience. Let me place some points to ponder before you on the topic allotted to us today.

1. If we are 'thriving' -- then why do we have to raise the question of survival? Is the 'environment' envisaged by us subjected to pollution?
What is that pollution? What are the deterrent forces, what are the hindrances?
What are the challenges?

All such questions are being constantly evolved in the minds of millions subjected to media bombardment. I am one of those millions - representing a country of the Indian subcontinent - whose geographical boundaries encompass only about 55 thousand square miles but haul more than 112 million people.

5. 'Media', if we casually examine the word, in the broadest sense, embraces the television and film entertainment industries, a vast array of regularly published printed material and even public relations and advertising.

6. The electronic form of mass communication created a profound effect on global societies, global politics, culture and values. A new multimedia environment is being evolved rapidly.

7. Depending on technology and delivery system of the content, this media environment took various shapes, forms in history. The content was (and definitely is) always the main concern of the controllers of human societies from the very beginning of human history. To command control on 'content', the tendency of power mongers was to control technology and delivery system -- i.e., the medium.
Election pledge of the present democratic government was to autonomise state controlled Television and Radio. And to keep the promise, the present Govt. has set up a high powered commission in October 1996. The commission did exhaustive work and submitted the report recently. And things are moving for proper phase-wise implementation.

I shall talk about the report and about private channels.

I strongly believe that 'autonomy' in papers are not sufficient. There never was any problem with the broadcasters. The problem was with the people at the helm of affairs -- politicians and bureaucrats. All propositions and efforts will fail -- if political will of the politicians in power are not democratised. The principles of democracy are sufficient to rejuvenate broadcasters, enjoy autonomy.

In a self-governing democratic system - people's right to access to information is supreme. We must understand that.

Broadcaster's responsibility is to pave the way to it and respond to needs and aspiration. They are to foster human values, restore security, ensure social stability. A broadcasters contribution would be for social progress and future. Their main areas of operation are:

i) spread the concept of multicultural coexistence

ii) activate free and varied debates and accountability in all social and political activities.

iii) NEWS, specially political report.

We should recognise, understand and analyse two peculiar phenomena arising out of media revolution:

a) while in a typical underdeveloped or developing country - media with meagre resources are struggling to keep Govt. from suppressing information which developed west take for granted.

b) mass media in developed countries are occupied with the role of a profitable business - sometimes devoid of human understanding.

19 (b) is very important. Fast growing technological advancement indirectly harms the concept of autonomy. I shall elaborate during seminar.