

The Daily Star

Tuesday August 29, 2006

Regulatory policy key obstacle to growth of media: Study

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A study on the media's role in development underscored the need to diversify terrestrial television and radio broadcasting in order to improve access to information for the economically and socially disadvantaged people.

The study, conducted by a media advocacy group facilitated by civil society think-tank Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI), identified the regulatory policy for the electronic media as the key constraints to the growth of media landscape in Bangladesh.

With the vision to create a policy environment conducive to the growth of diverse terrestrial broadcast industry, the study titled 'Media in Development: Linkages between Socio-Economic Development and Diversified Media in Bangladesh' offered detailed insights into the current state of the media from socio-economic perspectives and defines the role of the media in achieving the country's development goals.

"A large section of the population lack access to reliable regular channels for information," said Shahab Enam Khan, a lecturer of international relations at Jahangirnagar University, while briefing reporters on the study report yesterday.

The country has witnessed diversification of satellite and cable broadcasting, but the poor cannot afford to watch those channels, which are also unavailable in many rural areas, he said.

The print media is inaccessible to those who are illiterate or have low education levels and is often unavailable in rural areas, while Internet remains primarily the preserve of the urban, wealthy and educated elite, he added.

He also said no governments took any initiatives to give autonomy to Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar although they always highlighted the issue in their election manifestoes.

"This is a subject that should be the concern of all political parties because opening up the media is crucial to fulfilling the development goals," said BEI President Farooq Sobhan.

The study recommended establishing a permanent and independent National Broadcast Commission to regulate broadcast media and enacting legislation to create and enable public service broadcasting, private commercial broadcasting and community broadcasting systems.

It also recommended providing licence for terrestrial broadcast frequencies for private use and autonomy to Bangladesh Television and Bangladesh Betar.

The BEI will hold a national workshop on 'Diversification of Broadcast Media in Bangladesh' at its office today for better understanding of the issues.