

AMA Internationalizes Its TV Program

By Hazem Kira

Lahore, Pakistan: Launched in September of last year, the American Muslim Alliance's Global Forum TV program has recently recorded nine panel sessions which will be aired in the coming months on BRDIGES, RAVI, and Comcast in the United States, and at least one major channel in South Asia and the Middle East.

In the last week of December 2006, the much sought after TV program, Global Forum, recorded over 12 hours of panel discussions about Pakistani Elections 2007/2008 (three panels on "Legal and Constitutional Considerations", "Electoral Issues and Actors", and "Pakistani Political Parties: Goals and Strategies" , Pakistani Culture: Debates and Directions (three panels on "National Ideology and National Identity", "Pakistani Literature and National Consciousness", and "Media and Cultural Politics" , and Pakistani Progressive Movement (two panels on "Pakistani Left: Looking Back" and "Pakistani Left: Looking Forward" .

The ninth panel, "C. R. Aslam: A Life of Perpetual Struggle" was organized around a series of short interviews with and about the 92 year revolutionary thinker C. R. Aslam who has for the last seventy years played a major role in the articulation of progressive politics in Pakistan. (GFTV is working on a similar documentary about the life and times of late Dr. M. T. Mahdi).

During these panel discussions, Dr. Agha Saeed, the host of Global Forum TV, interviewed country's leading thinkers, political actors, and activists. (For details see <http://www.GlobalForumTV.Net>)

In the coming months, AMA's Global Forum TV plans to record similar programs in Central Asia, Middle East and Latin America.

The Global Forum TV (GFTV) focuses its programming on major world issues, promising "Global Affairs from Global Perspectives". The AMA has bought its own equipment, assembled and trained its own staff. With its main studio in Newark, CA, the GFTV has access to a global network of studios and contacts. The newly built studio makes it possible to produce its first-rate news analysis program, documentaries, and

highlight historical and contemporary Muslim cultures, literatures and philosophical traditions.

The importance of the AMA TV program, says Dr. Agha Saeed, “can only be understood in a global context.” This point, he says, became crystal clear during the recent Israeli invasion of Iraq. A number of journalists representing various Pakistani TV Channels, for example, ARY’s Dr. Shahid Masood and Geo’s Asma Sheerazi were reporting live from Beirut and Syria, respectively. This seemingly negligible fact, says Dr. Saeed, has several major implications: Modern technology has enabled third world electronic media to collect and report their own news and thus shed their dependence on the first world news agencies. Now third world channels offer competing interpretations of global events. This new, healthy, competition has enabled the global audiences to pick and accept stories that fit more closely with their own sense of truth.

For a long time folks in Delhi, Islamabad or even Moscow had to tune into BBC or Voice of America to get accurate news about their own countries. Roughly 96 percent of the information that flowed into third world living rooms came from the first world. Media that did exist, in the region, were either state run or state controlled. However, with the recent heralding of Al Jazeera, ARY and other alternative media sources with emphasis on rigorous research and in-depth reporting a more responsible, accurate and pluralistic media has arisen.

“Today, the media in the third world including the Muslim world is able to tell their own story in their own words through their own contacts and sources,” says Dr. Saeed.

Second, modern technology, funding, and greater autonomy have made it possible to break this relationship of dependence on news information. “Coverage of some (though definitely not all) issues by the Muslim media has been more honest than CNN, BBC, and Fox. Thus comparative view of these different sources has ended Western media hegemony by adding another side to the story (sometimes another set of stories) which is beginning to create a totally different response among those who previously had no means of knowing the other sides of the story or the other story.” Populations in the region can contrast the veracity of coverage from the various media outlets, and more capably determine authenticity, accuracy, and bias.

Al Jazeera’s motto of “the opinion and the OTHER opinion” has expanded the choices before the people in the region as well as beyond the region without forcing them to

subscribe to any particular line. It is not at all surprising, therefore, that only recently Israel prevailed on its new friend India to ban Arab channels from being seen in India, just as former Secretary of State Collin Powell had asked the Qatar government to force Al Jazeera television to censor itself by eliminating news items unfavorable to the West.

“These examples confirm that Israeli and Western commitment to democracy is tactical and not principled. Equally importantly, it shows that the budding Arab- Muslim media, though far from being perfect, is beginning to have a global impact. This time it is Israel and its western allies asking for censorship and not the Arab and Muslim countries.”

The one who seeks censorship is clearly the one who has lost the war of ideas.