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AIR to revive Bangla service - 'Probably one of its kind in the world'

Our Special Correspondent



The Indian Army receives a tumultuous welcome in what is now Bangladesh during the Liberation War of 1971, when the AIR Bangla service was launched

New Delhi, June 20: All India Radio will re-launch its special Bangla service for Bangladesh after a gap of six years, adding a cultural content to the news bulletins that conveyed India's perspective on global affairs.

The service, which began during the Liberation War of 1971, was discontinued in 2010 when the old transmitter in Calcutta broke down.

A strengthened transmitter with a higher capacity has now been installed in Chinsurah following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Dhaka visit last year, Prasar Bharati sources said.

"After the signing of the Land Boundary Agreement and the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal Motor Vehicle Agreement during the Prime Minister's visit, we are hoping the radio service will take forward our 'act east' policy," a senior official in the Union information and broadcasting ministry told **The Telegraph**.

The radio station, freshly named Akashvani Maitree, will go live on June 28 after being launched in Calcutta by President Pranab Mukherjee. Chief minister Mamata Banerjee will be present.

The channel will run 16 hours a day compared with the earlier six-and-a-half hours, and will cover the whole of Bangladesh. Its content will include Rabindra Sangeet, Nazrul Geeti and Baul songs.

"This radio station will probably be one of its kind in the whole world because it will see the participation of both countries, unlike foreign radio services where news bulletins from one country are relayed to other countries," Prasar Bharati chief executive officer Jawhar Sircar said.

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All India Radio officials said they were discussing with the Bangladesh government the possibility of the channel's content being made available also on local FM channels, although Bangladesh mostly listens to medium-wave radio.

"The channel is being re-launched to encourage emotional and cultural exchange between India and Bangladesh and spread awareness about the shared history and heritage," a senior All India Radio official, who is involved in the project, told this newspaper.

A theme note for the channel says: "No other international broadcaster has ever initiated any such venture where people from two nations can partake in content creation together."

It adds: "In view of the important place Bangladesh occupies in India's foreign policy and foreign perspective, it was felt imperative that this dedicated service is strengthened, contemporised and re-launched."

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