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Channel to boost Indo-Bangla ties

Sebanti Sarkar

In 1971, Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra was opened on Circus Avenue by freedom fighters from the erstwhile East Pakistan.

The transmissions from the radio station inspired people on both sides of the border to fight the oppressive Pakistani rule. The station folded up on December 16 after the birth of Bangladesh but All India Radio (AIR) continued broadcasting - albeit intermittently - on Special Bangla Service till a transmitter broke down in 2010.

Six years on, Akashvani Maitree is being launched to remind Bangladesh and India of their similarities. The growing presence of Radio China and Radio Iran in Bangladesh might have played a part in prompting the authorities to open the channel.

Akashvani Maitree - which will air at 594 kilohertz - will crackle into life at 11am on August 23. President Pranab Mukherjee is set to inaugurate the channel and its multimedia website from the Yellow Room of Raj Bhavan.

"Maitree was originally planned for a launch with much fanfare in June but the President's schedule didn't match. We will have a short programme in the evening at Nazrul Mancha, which will be broadcast live," an AIR official said.

The programme will include performances by folk troops of Bengal, a reading of Jibanananda Das's *Banglar Mukh* and other poems by actor Soumitra Chattopadhyay and recitation by Bratati Bandyopadhyay.

Akashvani Maitree will offer Bangladesh-specific news and entertainment and will also address the student community through programmes highlighting secular, anti-fundamentalist views.

The programmes will be designed in a way that Bangladeshis are encouraged to choose India as a medical destination and opt for Indian universities instead of those in the UK or the US.

Some of the programmes to be aired are Sambad Prabhaha (an exchange of news and views), Campus-ey Adda, Boiparar Khobor (about books and periodicals published in India and Bangladesh), Sholoanna Bangali (about people who have contributed to Bangladesh in some ways) and Ek mati Ek Sur (about similar cultural events like *baul melas* in Jadavpur and Kushtia).

"This is an outreach program which will bring people closer. There is a desire in people on both sides of the border to know how similar traditions thrive on different soils. Never before have we been able to frame a channel that invites artistes from neighbouring countries to perform in our studios," said Prasar Bharati CEO Jawhar Sircar.

The popular stage and screen personality of Bangladesh, Mamunur Rashid, hasn't heard of Maitree yet. "It must be the train you are talking about," he told **Metro** over the phone from Dhaka.

On being told about the channel, he recounted the days of the liberation war when he would make radio plays with Mustafa Monwar, Aly Zakher, and others.

"If the radio connection is revived it will be a good thing. To connect more should be our motto. The more we meet the less we hate, the less we will be taken in by blind beliefs and threats by mischief makers," Monwar said over the phone from Dhaka.

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