

Low-key launch likely for Akashvani Maitree



• [Anuradha Raman](#)

The hyped launch of the cross-border Bangla channel last month was suddenly cancelled

In sharp contrast to the hype generated two months ago, the launch of Akashvani Maitree, AIR's cross-border Bangla service, on August 23, will be a low-key affair, with just an address by President Pranab Mukherjee in Bangla. The service will be broadcast in India and Bangladesh on 596 KHz.

A statement by the Chief Executive Officer of the Prasar Bharati Corporation Jawhar Sircar said, "Prasar Bharati's speciality is not in organising events. Honourable President is very popular in both countries so nothing could be better. We also hope to have a more inauguration-centric event this time with live TV and radio coverage in both countries."

The President will deliver the short address in the presence of the West Bengal Governor and Mr. Sircar.

Wartime history

The Bangla radio service, launched in 1971 during the Bangladesh Liberation Movement and discontinued in 2010, was to go on air on June 28 with a mix of news and cultural programming. Invitations were extended to artists from both countries with poetry reading and music sessions — tribute to a shared legacy. The cultural extravaganza was, however, postponed following the cancellation of the President's trip to Kolkata two days ahead of the launch.

Big splash cut short

A month ago, ahead of the scheduled launch, there was considerable excitement on both sides of the border. Festoons were hung across Bengal and legendary artists like the Bangladeshi Rabindra Sangeet exponent Rezwana Choudhury Bannya were invited to perform at the inaugural ceremony, which was to be held at the Rabindra Sadan in Kolkata.

From the Indian side, veteran actor Saumitra Chaudhry was invited to read and singer Usha Uthup was asked to render *Ganga Amar Ma* and *Padma Amar Ma* (Ganga is my mother and Padma is my mother). The Indian side was determined to put a good show after having earmarked Rs. 2.05 crore for the event. Officials said the Home Ministry had committed funds for the channel.

But with the sudden cancellation, officials had to organise events hurriedly for the invited artists from Bangladesh.

After the postponement, senior officials in All India Radio sought fresh dates from the President's office.

Countering China

The re-launch of the channel on 596 KHz has twin objectives, say officials: To counter the presence of CRI (Chinese Radio International with its strong programming) and to attract Bengali-speaking listeners from both countries. Live-streaming of programmes online will cater to the Bengali diaspora.

Joint-collaborations are being planned for future telecast. The Digital Radio Mondiale transmitter in Chinsurah (West Bengal), as reported in The Hindu, will broadcast to neighbouring Bangladesh. The 1000 KW DRM super transmitter costs over Rs. 80 crore and is expected to reach the remotest corners of Bangladesh. Prasar Bharati's decision to use the expensive DRMs as opposed to the cheaper FM transmitters has been questioned in the past.

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