

Nostalgia of AIR - Eighty-nine years down the air waves



NEW DELHI: 'Yeh Aakashwani ka Rashtriya Kendra Hai. Ab Aap Samachar Suniye'.

We have all heard this line thousands of times with some minor variation here or there, but have seldom cared to go into the history of what is arguably the world's largest radio network.

And with the transistor and the mobile radio becoming easily accessible and the introduction of FM Radio, radio has had a faster growth in India than anywhere else in the world.

But for the avid listeners, they miss the resonant voice of the presenter Ameen Sayani who began on Radio Ceylon but then came to Vividh Bharati.

Today, as the National Broadcaster and also the premier Public Service Broadcaster, All India Radio (AIR) has been serving to inform, educate and entertain the masses since its inception, living up to its motto – 'Bahujan Hitaya : Bahujan Sukhaya'.

Prasar Bharati Chief Executive Officer Jawhar Sircar said in a message to Radioandmusic.com on the completion of 89 years of radio broadcasting: "AIR is proud of its legacy, but is not living on its past glory but reinventing itself through more and more services on Radio FM and internet."

It is unquestionably the largest broadcasting organisations in the world in terms of the number of languages of broadcast, the spectrum of socio-economic and cultural diversity it serves, and its home service comprises 419 stations today located across the country, reaching nearly 92% of the country's area and 99.19 % of the total population.

Although the inception can be traced back to the enforcement of the Telegraph Act on 1 October 1885, it was in June 1923 that the Radio Club of Bombay first attempted a broadcast, with the Calcutta Radio Club following in November the same year and by the Madras Presidency Radio Club on 31 July 1924.

But it was on 23 July 1927 that the Indian Broadcast Company (IBC), Bombay Station, was inaugurated by then Indian Viceroy Lord Irwin. The Calcutta station was inaugurated on 26 August 1927.

However, the IBC went into liquidation on 1 March 1930 and the next day the Indian State Broadcasting Service under Department of Industries and Labour commenced on experimental basis.

The post of "Controller of Broadcast" was instituted in March 1935 and Lionel Fielden appointed the first controller of Broadcasting in India on 30 August that year.

The word Akashvani - taken from Sanskrit meaning "celestial announcement" - was used on 10 September 1935 when Akashvani Mysore, a private radio station, was set up.

The first news bulletin was broadcast on 19 January 1936 and the Indian State Broadcasting Service became All India Radio on 8 June that year.

The Central News Organisation came into existence on 1 August 1937 and in November that year AIR came under Department of Communication. The External Service started with Pushtu broadcast on 1 October 1938.

AIR came under the Department of Information on 24 October 1941 but was shifted to the Department of Information & Arts on 23 February 1946 and this Department was changed to Department of Information and Broadcasting on 10 September that year.

There were six Radio Stations in India (Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, Tiruchirapalli and Lucknow) and three Radio Stations in Pakistan (Peshawar, Lahore and Dacca) at the time of partition in 1947.

The Central News Organisation (CNO) was split up into two Divisions, News Service Division and External Service Division (ESD) in September 1948

