

BBC gets a foothold in Pakistan

By Azra Mujeeb

Down 87.00 Communicator

A FEW weeks back, the Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation entered into an agreement with the BBC enabling it to rebroadcast the latter's programmes on culture, sports, science, music and the English language on Radio Pakistan's national channels. This was indeed depressive news for those watching the affairs of the media in this country.

There are two corollaries to the idea behind this agreement which was called "a significant development" by the BBC chief executive, Mr Mark Bayford, who had specially flown from London to Islamabad to sign that document. First, it leads one to believe that even after 53 years of its existence, the Pakistani radio is not competent enough to produce quality programmes. Second, it leaves one wondering if it is not the beginning of a process of making ourselves victims of another kind of imperialism that tries to rule over the minds of the people.

As far as the competence of the Pakistani radio is concerned, it is felt that the impression created by this agreement is not correct. At least in the field of sports, Radio Pakistan has set quite high standards in live coverage of events as well as in sports-feature production. In fact, it has played a key role in making this nation sports minded.

Even today, the PBC presents three feature programmes on sports carrying the latest news and analysis daily on its national network, in addition to those produced at various stations locally. On other subjects, Radio Pakistan has been guilty of indifference rather than incompetence. To be fair, in its earlier

with enough funds nor energy to produce programmes on these subjects. So, what was really needed was that the Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation should have been asked to pay more attention to such programmes and groom up its own teams of talkers, script writers and producers for such subjects. They should have been provided with necessary funds to do it themselves instead of acquiring it from a foreign source.

There is a tendency in this country to always judge our performance in any field by comparing it with that of our eastern neighbour. It would, therefore, be relevant to mention here that a large proportion of the programmes of the BBC Television's World Service, viewed in this region, are scripted, compered and produced by Indians. These programmes happen to be on a wide range of subjects including entertainment, modern living, tourism, business and economy, the automobile industry and science and technology. The production of a television programme is a far more complicated affair than that of a radio programme. So, is it not humiliating to find ourselves borrowing radio programmes from the BBC while the Indians are supplying television programmes to the same BBC?

Coming to the second aspect mentioned above, the rebroadcast of its selected programmes is not the real goal of the BBC, it is only the first step. What they actually want is the direct relay of their Urdu Service by the national broadcaster, that is, Radio Pakistan. They had made a very serious and high level effort in this direction during Benazir's second regime but failed.

The national broadcasting

retain the interest of the listener, news and other items related to the target area are also included. But with the BBC it is different.

The BBC possesses the best equipped network of overseas broadcasting manned by highly capable persons from the target areas who not only possess excellent command over the language of the area concerned but also a deep insight into the history, culture, economy and politics

has been relentlessly working not only for the expansion of the reach of its transmissions but also for building up its image as the fountainhead of all kinds of knowledge and learning. Getting its programmes re-broadcast or relayed on the national channels of the receiving countries helps in both.

On the one hand, relay by the local network would enable the BBC to reach even the remotest corners of the country with good

hae yeh kahani'. It carried objectionable remarks about Pakistan and its founder resulting in a number of newspaper articles and letters to the editors of Pakistani newspapers protesting against those outrageous remarks in particular and the BBC's unreasonable attitude towards this country, in general.

The numerous language services of the BBC do not operate countrywise but languagewise. The Urdu Service, therefore, is

With this background, which must be fully known to and understood by our media managers, one wondered how it was that the BBC was granted the foothold for which they had been lobbying and pressuring Pakistan for more than a decade. Even if Radio Pakistan does not go so far as to relay the Urdu Service of the BBC, the present agreement has paved the way for the soon-to-come private radios to offer this service to the foreign media-imperialism. When Radio Pakistan, the national broadcaster, can rebroadcast BBC's programmes, how can the proposed Regulatory Authority on Media Broadcast Organisations prevent a private radio channel from making easy money by relaying the programmes of that media giant which has been certified to be honest and sincere by the government controlled radio itself?

Of course, it is not only through the radio or the television that perceptions and views of the citizens of any country can be re-moulded by thinking or preaching from the outside. Foreign books, magazines and newspapers, too, serve as carriers of alien thoughts. But the print media's role in this respect is restricted by constraints like illiteracy, language problems and accessibility. Furthermore, usually only those who are better informed, widely read, intellectually mature and capable of discerning what is really good and acceptable have access to them. On the other hand, large cross-sections of society, including immature minds and emotional audiences, are exposed to foreign programmes, more so in their Urdu and other Pakistani

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of the region. Besides them, there are British experts who specialize in the affairs of the region and reporters and stringers sending daily reports from the areas concerned.

Naturally, such a grand setup involves heavy expenditures. Since the BBC's external services are funded by government grants, the question arises as to what return the British get from all this. The answer is not difficult to find. Britain, after losing its vast empire over

reception conditions and, on the other hand, this would enhance its prestige and credibility among the local listeners as no other foreign broadcasting organisation has ever been granted such a privilege.

Unfortunately, the BBC has never been sympathetic towards Pakistan. This attitude is in evidence not only in the news and current affairs reports and analyses but also in programmes related to culture, history and other non-political subjects.

targeted not only towards Pakistan but also towards India because this language is widely spoken and understood there also. As British media people and intellectuals have a soft corner for the Hindus as against the Muslims since the days of the Indian freedom movement, all the relevant programmes in this service usually carry a tilt against the two-nation theory which forms the basis for Pakistan. It is, therefore, not

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Even today, the PBC presents three feature programmes on sports carrying the latest news and analysis daily on its national network, in addition to those produced at various stations locally. On other subjects, Radio Pakistan has been guilty of indifference rather than incompetence. To be fair, in its earlier years, Radio Pakistan used to present programmes of greater intellectual, artistic and scientific content regularly. But gradually the obsession for publicity that characterized all governments, elected and non-elected, kept the radio so occupied that ultimately it was left neither

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The national broadcasting organizations of many countries, including Pakistan, broadcast services for other countries in the respective languages of the target areas. The main purpose of such broadcasts is usually to acquaint the listener with the country from where the broadcast originates, although, to

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Naturally, such a grand setup involves heavy expenditures. Since the BBC's external services are funded by government grants, the question arises as to what return the British get from all this. The answer is not difficult to find. Britain, after losing its vast empire over which the sun never set, has devised a strategy under which her electronic media network can help her in playing an important role in global affairs, especially in the politics of the regions which were once part of her empire.

That explains why the BBC

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Unfortunately, the BBC has never been sympathetic towards Pakistan. This attitude is in evidence not only in the news and current affairs reports and analyses but also in programmes related to culture, history and other non-political subjects, even sports. To give one example, the BBC Urdu Service presented a series of programmes to mark the 50th year of the independence of the subcontinent in 1997. The sarcastic tone of the programme was manifest in its very title, 'Hindu Pani Muslim Pani, Pachaas saal ki

targeted not only towards Pakistan but also towards India because this language is widely spoken and understood there also. As British media people and intellectuals have a soft corner for the Hindus as against the Muslims since the days of the Indian freedom movement, all the relevant programmes in this service usually carry a tilt against the two-nation theory which forms the basis for Pakistan. It is, therefore, not uncommon to find the BBC's Urdu programmes on culture, literature, music and other subjects propagating with great subtlety — of which they are undoubtedly a most effective practitioners — the common roots of the people of the two countries and the futility of the partition.

to the foreign media-imperialism. When Radio Pakistan, the national broadcaster, can rebroadcast BBC's programmes, how can the proposed Regulatory Authority on Media Broadcast Organisations prevent a private radio channel from making easy money by relaying the programmes of that media giant which has been certified to be honest and sincere by the government controlled radio itself?

Of course, it is not only through the radio or the television that perceptions and views of the citizens of any country can be re-moulded by thinking or preaching from the outside. Foreign books, magazines and newspapers, too, serve as carriers of alien thoughts. But the print media's role in this respect is restricted by constraints like illiteracy, language problems and accessibility. Furthermore, usually only those who are better informed, widely read, intellectually mature and capable of discerning what is really good and acceptable have access to them. On the other hand, large cross-sections of society, including immature minds and emotional audiences, are exposed to foreign radio programmes, more so if their Urdu and other Pakistani language programmes are rebroadcast or relayed by local channels. Thus the probability of their causing a damage is manifold greater.

No one is against an open window to let the fresh air in. But if the air outside is dusty or polluted, it is wiser to keep the window shut. ■