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Paper No. 6
Bangladesh Betar was established under a Presidential order in 1972 i.e. immediately after the emergence of Bangladesh as an independent sovereign country in 1971. Responding to the call of our great national leader, father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman to wage a total war against the occupation forces of Pakistan a number of patriotic officials of the then Radio Pakistan started an independent Radio Station in the name and style of “Swadhin Bangla Biplobi Betar Kendra” in Kalurghat of Chittagong district to help and inspire the liberation forces. Later, this station was shifted to Mujib Nagar, the place from where our govt in exile was functioning. During the nine months of war with Pakistani occupation forces, Swadhin Bangla Biplobi Betar Kendra was the only electronic media which broadcast programmes and news bulletin as per direction of the government in exile. This Betar Kendra was the only source of inspiration for the people of our country which kept them informed about the war with Pakistan. The programmes and news broadcast from Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra inspired the entire nation to unite and to stand by the side of the Freedom Fighters, who were fighting tooth and nail to liberate the country from the shackles of Pakistan. So the history of Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra has been written in Golden letters along with the history of the liberation war of Bangladesh.

Bangladesh Betar has seven stations located in the seven regions of the country—the main Broadcasting station known as the National Broadcasting House, being located in Dhaka—the capital city of Bangladesh. Bangladesh Betar has transmission capacity of more than two thousand Kilowatts, which covers the entire country both in respect of area and population. Two
full-fledged stations of 10 KW each are going to be formally inaugurated this year in the south and south-eastern part of the country. These two stations when commissioned will serve our listeners living in the coastal areas well particularly during cyclone, tidal bore and other natural calamity.

Bangladesh Betar broadcast 160 hrs programmes from all its stations everyday. Of the total broadcast hours, 55% is devoted to entertainment programmes like music, songs, dramas, short series etc. while 45% broadcast hour is allocated for different programmes on various subjects of public interest. The national programmes are broadcast from the Dhaka station of the Betar & relayed by all stations. Regional stations are also authorized to make their own programmes and broadcast the same direct from their respective stations. At present, Bangladesh Betar is broadcasting 28 News bulletins and two news commentaries daily, 16 from Dhaka and the rest are from the regional stations.

The main objective of Bangladesh Betar is to inform, educate, entertain, unite, inspire and motivate people in general to actively participate in the nation-building activities undertaken by the government. But a new dimension has been added to our priority schedule now by the frequency of national calamities hitting Bangladesh almost every year.

During these calamities or other emergency periods, Bangladesh Betar continues its session without any break until normalcy returns.

Bangladesh being a poor and developing country, the majority of its people can hardly afford to buy TV sets and maintain it. Moreover, supply of electricity is also very limited in Bangladesh. So most of the rural and urban people living in slum areas depend on transistor Radio as a means
of their recreation. Bangladesh Betar has been broadcasting programmes on agriculture, health and family welfare, education, child and mother care, sanitation, plantation etc. It has been observed that these programmes have been successfully geared towards the targeted groups. The impact of these programmes are so deep that people in general have become aware of their day to day problems they are confronted with and get the solution from betar's innovative and informative programmes. Programmes on population control and population planning have met with tremendous success because of the acceptance by concerned people. Programmes on agriculture has helped a lot in bringing revolutionary changes in the method of cultivation of HYV corps, pest control and use of fertilizers. The result is that Bangladesh is now on the threshold of self-sufficiency in food and Bangladesh Betar's contribution in this field has been aptly appreciated by all concerned including our foreign donors and developing partners and agencies.

Until recently, Betar had to broadcast programme sitting in the air-conditioned studios of the Betar Building in a traditional way. But, of late, Betar has brought some changes in its programming and under the new programmes Betar brought out its producers to go to rural and slum areas and broadcast programmes direct from there. The producers talk to the people on various subjects - their problems and prospect, and record their views which are broadcast in their presence on a later date fixed by Betar authority. The result has been very encouraging and positive. A great deal of interest has now been generated and people seem to be very keen to listen to betar's programme. The reason behind this is that not only do they enjoy the programme but also get solution to their day-to-day problem.

Betar produces and broadcast programme not only for its domestic listeners, but produces programme and broadcast news bulletins for its overseas listeners also. At present, Bangladesh
Betar broadcasts its programme in six different languages from its External Services Unit namely- Bangla, English, Hindi, Urdu, Arabic and Nepalese. These programmes are produced by professional experts, keeping in view the interest of the listeners living in different countries of South East, Europe and the Middle Eastern countries.

In domestic field Bangladesh Betar’s most popular programme is its Commercial programme. It has generated a great deal of interest amongst the entrepreneurs who are coming in large numbers to advertise their products through Betar. Since Betar has got mass appeal and as the vast majority of the people living in urban and rural areas listen to Betar’s programme— they think that this is a media very vital for popularizing their products. Betar now allocates 10-30 hours daily for its Commercial programmes. Betar is earning more than ten million taka from its commercial programme per month. If Betar could allocate more time for commercials, it could earn more. But due to shortage of time and transmitter Betar is unable to accommodate more advertisements. The result is that a good number of commercial farms are not getting the chance to advertise their products through Bangladesh Betar.

Bangladesh believe that a free flow of information alone can bring quantitative and qualitative changes in the public mind, which is necessary for taking our people along in the pursuit of any noble goal. Bangladesh has made its sky free. People can use dish antenna to watch foreign satellite TV programmes sitting in their bed rooms. The Bangladesh Television relays BBC and CNN programmes for several times daily. Print media is absolutely free in Bangladesh. The BBC World Service radio programmes are broadcast by a FM radio transmitter in Dhaka for more than 11 hours daily. Bangladesh Betar has renewed its agreement with BBC World Service to continue this programmes for another two years. Bangladesh government has already decided to give autonomy to its electronic media. Besides Bangladesh Betar has been authorised
by the National Assembly to broadcast parliamentary proceedings direct from the Assembly Building. This programme has become very very popular among the people of all walks of life. This has ensured transparency of the govt. and as a result, govt. has become directly accountable to its voters in particular and the entire population in general. Recently Bangladesh government has decided to allow TV and Betar channels to operate in the private sector. It is expected that by the end of current fiscal year TV and Betar will be opened to private sector. This will usher a new era in the Broadcasting arena in Bangladesh. It will also promote a healthy competition between the public and the private sectors and will ensure the best possible use of available resources for electronic media development and collaboration in electronic media research.

Bangladesh falls into the category of LDC countries. So Bangladesh has to depend on the resources from its development partners for undertaking and executing various development projects, accordingly to the priority fixed by the govt. Agriculture, education, health and family welfare, sanitation, Infrastructure development and social sector have been fixed as priority sectors in Bangladesh. It is therefore evident that information sector falls into the category of non-priority sector. Therefore, development of this sector depends mostly on the availability of the domestic resources which is not at all sufficient to meet the demands of these non-priority sectors.

Bangladesh Betar is managing its broadcasting programme with the old and time based equipments. Betar has to depend on the foreign suppliers for spare parts, which if fund is available, takes about four to five months for procurement. It has been observed that with the development of modern technology most of the suppliers do not produce the spares for the transmitters they supplied to our country. We have, therefore, become apprehensive about the
availability of spares in future. So Bangladesh along with other least developing countries making desperate effort to replace the old equipment's and to go for new and modern technologies in its broadcasting systems. But the question remains where will the fund be available? It has therefore become imperative on the part of our developing partners to come up with fund necessary for our development. Otherwise, the poor L.C.D's like Bangladesh may face immense difficulties, even to maintain the existing facilities for lack of funds as well as for non-availability of spares from the suppliers. Bangladesh believes that a threadbare discussing will take place on this vital issue and arrive at a concrete decision to ask for substantial help from the developed countries for introducing new technologies in our broadcasting system.

The shortage of trained man-power is another impediments we have been facing for many years. Although our newly recruited BCS officers receive foundation training in the BPATC (Bangladesh Public Administration Training Centre) for few months on various subjects—they are not provided with any specialized training on programme production, news making and other special subject of national and international interest. In Bangladesh there is a training institute called NIMC (National Institute of Mass Communication) which impart training to officials of Betar and BTV. But that training is also not adequate to understand the basic needs of particular country vis-a-vis international affairs. So inspite of our best intention to develop and improve the quality of our man-power we are simply failing. It is in this context that we would urge upon the specialised agencies and other doners to allocate funds adequate for training producers in the best institutions of the world. This will help them to develop their mental faculty and will make them keen to produce programme of public interest in a better way. Here we may quote our Hon'ble President, who said "The everleaping advances in technologies have got to be mastered in no time, which in turn, shall necessitate adequate training of the huge man-power we have. There is no alternative to training." We would urge upon the international community to
realise the importance of this and make adequate funds available for training the producers and others of the LDC, in large numbers.

There is no denying the fact that technology is changing rapidly. It is felt that in this region, although Singapore and Hongkong, probably now India are on the cutting edge of technology, many country like Bangladesh have limitation in financial as well as technological know how. We are confronting today by using "yesterdays technology. The technology which is absolute in the present day world. To make a balance between the old and traditional system and the present and modern system - we shall have to make choices in term of technologies (Satellite vs territorial microwave) and its application (education health and business).