

**Speech by the President of India, Shri Pranab  
Mukherjee on the occasion of launch of Akashvani  
Maitree  
Raj Bhawan, Kolkata : August 23, 2016**

1. It is indeed a privilege for me to be present amidst you today on the happy occasion of launch of Akashvani Maitree Channel. With this launch, a new chapter is being added in the annals of India-Bangladesh relations. Akashvani Maitree and its multimedia website is a unique venture and initiative of All India Radio not only for the Bengali listeners in West Bengal, Bangladesh and the adjoining areas but the entire Bengali speaking Diaspora living in different parts of the globe.
  
2. India and Bangladesh are not just neighbours but are bound by an umbilical connection of ethnicity and kinship. India always attaches highest importance to bilateral relations with Bangladesh because of our shared history, heritage, culture, language, physical proximity and also the role which the two nations can play together for the development and prosperity of the entire subcontinent and beyond. The bedrock on which the edifice of this unique relationship stands is the unwavering faith of both the countries in democratic values, principles of liberalism, egalitarianism, secularism and respect for each other's sovereignty and integrity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

3. The Akashvani Maitree channel can play a significant role in promoting and preserving the composite Bengali cultural heritage which is the proud inheritance of all Bengali speaking people irrespective of their geographical location. I am sure that the blending of content from both India and Bangladesh in the fields of art, culture, literature, music, sports and also on shared socio-economic issues will make the channel a unique one and establish it in the hearts of millions of radio loving people both in India and Bangladesh as well as outside.

4. The concept of this unique channel emanates from the decision taken during the visit of the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi to Bangladesh, regarding sharing content among the broadcasting organisations of the two nations. The aim was to further strengthen the existing close cultural, economic, political and emotional bonding between the two neighbours and provide a forum for better people to people contact. I understand that the content of the channel shall be oriented in such a manner that it is useful for listeners on both sides of the border. Knowledge and best practices will be shared in various fields including agricultural research, medical science, disaster management, education, science and technology.
5. Akashvani has a special place in the hearts of millions of people of the radio loving nation of Bangladesh since 1971 when the precursor to Akashvani Maitree, a special service in Bangla was launched in the wake of the Bangladesh Liberation Movement. The Channel had played a historic role during the liberation movement.
6. Akashvani Maitree shall now be broadcast from a State of the art brand new high power 1000 Kw DRM transmitter with a capacity to reach the entire length and breadth of Bangladesh through medium wave and shall also be available globally on its website and mobile App. In this sense, launching of Akashvani Maitree is of epoch making importance and today is indeed a red-letter day for the people of West Bengal and Bangladesh.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

7. The geographical entity known as the Indian subcontinent has always been a melting pot of cultures. Ours is a unique composite civilization and cultural ethos. Rabindra Nath Tagore in his poem “Bharat tirtha”, once observed and I quote:

*‘ keh nahi jane kar awhane koto manusher dhara  
 Durbar srote elo kotha hote samudre holo hara  
 Hethai aarjo , hetha anarjo, hethai dravid chin  
 Sak hun dal, pathan mughal ek dehe holo lin...  
 Tara mor majhe sabai biraje ... keh nahe nahe dur.. aamar shonite  
 roychhey dhwanite tari bichitra sur..”*

In spite of the political divisions forced by the historic realities the same cultural ethos reverberates in the hearts of all the people belonging to this region.

8. And the hope lies there. Our languages, our music, our literature, our aspirations, our destiny, our rivers, our mountains, songs of our birds all bind us together. Akashvani Maîtree makes a beginning today to give a new expression to these common aspirations and experiences. This will go a long way to usher in an atmosphere of amity and peace in the entire region which in turn will serve as a catalyst for further development and prosperity of our people.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

9. In the long history of the world, relations between nations have seen many trials and tribulations. Wars have been fought and then realignments and reconciliations made to move forward on the path of common prosperity and progress. Establishment of the European Union and European Common Market with a common currency are the finest examples in this regard.
10. A similar initiative was taken when seven nations of South Asia came together to establish the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in order to strengthen regional cooperation and creating an atmosphere for peace and prosperity. Bangladesh had played a key role in this connection. India and Bangladesh can work together for further realizing the full potential of the SAARC initiative. As I have often said, we can choose our friends but not our neighbours. It is for us to decide if we want to live in a state of perpetual tension with our neighbours or develop together in an atmosphere of peace and harmony.
11. India and Bangladesh have in recent times made many a stride forward in every walk of life. India remains firmly committed to partner with Bangladesh in its economic growth and development. Regular exchanges and interactions between our two peoples are of critical importance to enhance mutual understanding and goodwill. The stage is now set for a quantum jump in our relations. The coming days will see further strengthening of co-operation between our two nations for

eradication of poverty, enhancing economic growth, promotion of trade as well as for fighting against the evil forces of terrorism, extremism and fundamentalism. I am confident that India-Bangladesh relations will always remain special and unique in the annals of South Asian history.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

12. Communications is the key for deeper engagement. India and Bangladesh must increase connectivity by every means including radio, television and other digital links besides communications through road, railways, waterways and air.
13. Akashvani Maitree can thus be an important channel of communication between India and Bangladesh and is a step forward in the right direction. My heartiest congratulations to each one of those involved in the fruition of this wonderful venture of diplomacy through the medium of radio. As our economies get more integrated and our people better connected, our nations will move towards better progress and prosperity.
14. Before I conclude, I wish to thank the organizers for giving me the opportunity to be part of this momentous event in Indo-Bangla relations. This is an equally significant moment for the entire Bengali speaking population worldwide, as now, a platform has been created for integration and promotion of composite Bengali culture where the best from both West Bengal and Bangladesh will be showcased and the centuries old Bengali tradition and heritage shall be preserved.

Thank you.

**Jai Hind!**

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