

# **Excerpts from 'Major Recommendations' of the Working Group on Autonomy for Akashvani and Doordarshan constituted under the Chairmanship of Shri B.G. Verghese**

**(February, 1978)**

## **Preface**

We envisage an autonomous national trust as the authority under which Akashvani and Doordarshan should grow. This we are naming Akash Bharati - the National Broadcast Trust.

## **Chapter 2 - Communication Policy and Broadcasting**

**3.** An autonomous broadcast organisation, nationally owned and responsible to Parliament and yet under the Centre legislatively and for purposes of international relations through external broadcasts and frequency allocations, and P&T and Space support, appears logical and desirable.

*(2.30)*

## **Chapter 4 - Policy and Organisational parameters**

**5.** The NBT has to be highly sensitive to react swiftly to the needs and sentiments of the different components of its mass audience. At the same time it will have steadfastly to withstand the day-to-day political and other pressures to which its power will expose it.

**6.** The Working Group are of the view that there should not be autonomous regional corporations or even a federation of State Government corporations. Instead, a single National Broadcast Trust is proposed under which a highly decentralised structure is envisaged. There will be a large measure of power delegated to the regional and local level so that the organisation enjoys the advantages of quick decision-making, sensitivity to local problems, familiarity with local customs and taste, and close linkages with various governments and institutions.

*(4.17)*

**7.** The engineers and programme staff have to work as a closely knit team, representing as they do both medium and message. To separate the two would be to diminish the efficiency and even the creativity of the system. Production autonomy would also be undermined by external engineering control.

*(4.20)*

**8.** The Working Group are unable to support the proposal to create two separate corporations for Akashvani and Doordarshan. However, there is need to recognise the distinctive identity of radio and television within the ambit of a new integrated structure.

## **Chapter 5 - The Legal Framework**

**9.** We are of the opinion that all the national broadcasting services should be vested exclusively in an independent, impartial, and autonomous organisation established by law by Parliament to act as a trustee for the national interest. (5.4)

**10.** The autonomy of the corporation and its independence from government control should be entrenched in the Constitution itself and, the idea of a trust woven into it. (5.9)

**15.** A restricted power can legitimately be given to the Government to require the Trust to refrain from broadcasting any matter which has a clear relation to national security, the preservation of public order, and other matters of grave public importance. A power can also be conferred, on the Government to require broadcasts in cases of emergency. In broadcasting such announcements the corporation shall announce that such a requirement has been made. (5.14)

**16.** The President and the Prime Minister should have access to Akashvani and Doordarshan for national broadcasts. A similar right should extend to the Governors and Chief Ministers of States for State broadcasts over regional networks. (5.15)

**19.** Once the National Broadcast Trust comes into being, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting should shed its direct responsibility for broadcasting and might thereafter appropriately be redesigned "Ministry of Information". (5.21)

**20.** In regard to the relationship between the broadcasting organisations and Parliament, the best compromise between the claims of autonomy and of accountability is to impose on the Trust a duty to report to Parliament through its budget and an annual report together with its accounts and auditor's comments thereon. The Report should also incorporate the report of the Complaints Board and a review of the operations of the Licensing Board and the franchise stations. Members of Parliament have an inherent right to ask questions. But it is expected that they will refrain from so doing on day-to-day issues. (5.22)

**22.** Financial accountability would be ensured through independent commercial audit. In view of the unique characteristics of the broadcast system we recommend that its accounts be commercially audited by any approved firm of auditors of standing, and not to be subject to the jurisdiction of the Comptroller and Auditor-General of India. (5.24)

## **Chapter 6 - The Board of Trustees**

**24.** At the apex of Akash Bharati or National Broadcast Trust we recommend a Board of Trustees or Nyasi Mandal consisting of 12 persons, but not to exceed 21 should there be need for inducting additional members. The Trustees (Nyasis) will be guardians of the Charter given to the National Broadcast Trust by Statute. (6.1)

**25.** The Controller-General of Broadcasting (CGB) heading the Central Executive

Board will be *ex-officio* Secretary to the Board of Trustees so as to provide an organic link between these two tiers.

(6.14, 19)

**26.** We recommend the appointment of a Board of Trustees of 12 members consisting of a Chairman and three other full-time members who will devote themselves to the fields of Current Affairs, Extension, and Culture respectively. They will operate through the CGB.

(6.15)

**27.** In addition to the Chairman and the three other full-time Trustees we recommend that of the eight other part-time Trustees at least one other should be highly experienced in the field of finance and management and another should be an eminent scientist or engineer familiar with the technology of broadcasting.

(6.16)

**31.** The Trustees shall be appointed for a term of six years, one-third of the members retiring every alternate year. The order of retirement among the initial 12 Trustees should be settled by draw of lots with the proviso that the Chairman and the three full-time functional Trustees shall be deemed to have a six-year term.

(6.21)

**32.** One of the most important tasks of the Trustees will be to appoint the Controller-General of Broadcasting, the Directors and other senior personnel up to the level of Controllers, that is, members of the proposed Zonal Executive Boards. They would also name the members of the proposed Licensing Board. Another critical responsibility will be the preparation and submission of the budget and an annual report to Parliament including the working of the proposed franchise stations, together with the audited accounts of Akash Bharati. All major investment and policy decisions bearing on the expansion of the broadcast system, technological choices, the quality of service, major programme departures, and issues likely to affect the financial viability of the Trust, including wage and salary revisions, should be subject to approval by the Board of Trustees.

(6.22)

**36.** We recommend that the Trustees should enjoy the status of Supreme Court Judges and should be subject to similar disqualifications and procedures for removal. The age bar, however, need not apply.

(6.27)

## **Chapter 7 - Management and Programme Structure**

**43.** A Central Executive Board consisting of the Controller-General of Broadcasting (CGB) and 12 Directors will be responsible for implementing the policies and directives of the Board of Trustees. The Directors will each be responsible for Akashvani, Doordarshan, Current Affairs, Engineering, Finance, Personnel, and Audience Research respectively. In addition, there will be five Zonal Directors who would each head a Zonal Executive Board.

**46.** Technical personnel in Akashvani and Doordarshan should be interchangeable. For the same reason, even on the programme side, where the degree of media specialisation admittedly has to be higher, people should be able to move between

television and radio so that the careers of versatile and talented broadcasters are not unduly inhibited.

*(7.23)*

**49.** Internal audit should be constituted as an autonomous department under a Chief Internal Auditor reporting to the CGB.

*(7.30)*

**57.** We recommend the establishment of a Complaints Board of Nyaya Mandal, a quasi-judicial body of four persons selected by the Chief Justice of India.

*(7.51)*

**58.** It will deal with complaints from the public relating to charges of unjust or unfair treatment including unwarranted invasion of privacy and misrepresentation provided the right of recourse to the Courts is waived. The finding should be published by the NBT in its programme journals and broadcast in special programmes.

**60.** There should be a Broadcast Review Commission every seven years.

**(7.56)**

## **Chapter 8 - The Financial Dimension**

**61.** It would be best to transfer the existing assets of Akashvani and Doordarshan valued at about Rs. 75 crores as an outright grant to the National Broadcast Trust by an Act of Parliament.

*(8.15)*

**62.** The National Broadcast Trust will not be liable to corporate taxation. Its profits, if any, will be ploughed back for programme improvement and system expansion along lines approved by Parliament which will scrutinise its annual report and accounts.

*(8.17)*

**63.** The Government should initially bridge the NBT's revenue deficit for a period of five years after which it should be expected to stand on its own feet or raise additional resources by charging for broadcast time made available by it to various users, including the Central and State Governments.

*(8.20)*

**65.** For its capital budget, the NBT should receive as an outright grant the amount outstanding in the Non-Lapsable fund as well as annual grants until 1982 of all the amounts already agreed to under the heading of Replacement and Renewal for Akashvani and Doordarshan. The NBT should prepare a long term capital budget, the first five year segment of which should be discussed with the Planning Commission and Government on the basis of which the Government should be committed to a block grant made available in annually budgeted amounts in accordance with a phased programme.

*(8.26, 31, 33, 34)*

## **Chapter 11 - Franchise Stations**

**74.** The National Broadcast Trust should be authorised to grant broadcast franchise

whether for radio or television to approved educational institutions. Such a franchise recommendation by the National Broadcast Trust should automatically be converted into a broadcast licence by the Ministry of Communications, the specific frequencies being allocated and coordinated by the Ministry's Wireless Adviser.

*(11.23)*

**75.** The franchise should be granted by an NBT Licensing Board manned by part-time Commissioners. The Licences should be granted for three year periods at a time and should be renewed on satisfaction of performance. The Franchise Stations should not broadcast news bulletins but should relay these from the Akashvani/Doordarshan network. They should be placed under the general supervision of the NBT and should be answerable to the Complaints Board as well as to the Trustees who would be empowered to issue written directives.

*(11.24, 25)*

**76.** We would disallow commercial advertising over these educational stations but we envisage great possibilities in programme exchange both among Franchise Stations and between them and Akashvani and Doordarshan.

*(11.28)*

## **Chapter 18 - A New deal for Staff**

**172.** Consistent with the ethos of the NBT as a non-profit Trust and an essential service, we recommend the establishment of a grievance machinery at various levels which should be automatically activated in the case of any difference or dispute, screened by a special selection panel and the existing "CIS quota" of 219 in Akashvani and Doordarshan should be filled from among those selected. They should thereafter be regarded as permanent employees of the NBT and should sever their connections with the CIS.

*(18.22)*

**180.** Similar selection and fitment procedure are recommended in respect of Akashvani and Doordarshan posts encadred in the Central Secretariat Service, the Central Secretariat Stenographers' Service, and the Central Secretariat Clerical Service, all belonging to the Information and Broadcasting Ministry's cadres. Similar fitment and selection procedures should be followed for filling in the posts in the Pay and Accounts Sections of the NBT. Deputationists should also be given the option as others and be subjected to identical procedures.

*(18.23)*

**190.** Existing employees as are taken over by the NBT should be afforded protection in respect of their present benefits such as emoluments, housing, medical facilities, pension and gratuity, leave travel, and educational benefits. Existing employees (including staff artists) should continue to be entitled to the allotment of pool accommodation from the Government for a transitional period.

*(18.12(i), 38)*

## **Chapter 21 - Transitional Provisions**

**215.** The Akash Bharati Act should come into force with effect from January 1, 1979 and certain transitional sections even earlier, if necessary. From, say, October 15,

1978 onwards Akashvani and Doordarshan should be placed under an Officer-on-Special-Duty heading a Transitional Board of Management to undertake the staff work relating to transfer of assests and liabilities of the NBT and to work out procedures whereby the CIS cadre and other staff on deputation will be enabled to exercise an option regarding whether to go over to the proposed NBT or return to their parent services.

*(21.8, 9)*