

Observations from a listening project on the North Eastern Service of All India Radio Shillong (Meghalaya)

by Dr Hansjoerg Biener

Introduction

The North Eastern service of AIR Shillong has been available as a web stream at <http://allindiaradio.gov.in/Default.aspx> since 2017. (You need to scroll to the bottom of the “listen live”-window.) The character of the service differs very much from all the other web streams available there, including the FM services Gold and Rainbow. If my memory serves well the North East Service was established in the 90s as a successor to the Guwahati B service.

All India Radio Shillong was founded on 1 July 1948 as a twin station with Guwahati. The Shillong twin was formally inaugurated by the Governor of Assam Sir Akbar Haydari in the presence of the Chief Minister Gopinath Bordoloi, because Shillong was the capital of Assam at that time. The cooperation between the twin stations was not easy, and finally Guwahati became the more important AIR station. It was only after the establishment of Meghalaya as a separate union state (1972), that AIR Shillong regained a more prominent role. (By the way: One of the many on air examples of a pronunciation confusing the non native English speaker was the name of the state: Finally, the mystery is solved by a you tube video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v6rH44AyBRc>: Both “Mega-‘laia” and (Hindi) Meg-‘halia” are possible.)

Surprisingly, the web site <http://allindiaradio.gov.in/Station/SHILLONG/Pages/default.aspx> only mentions the medium wave frequency of 864 kHz and a FM frequency 103.6 MHz. According to Jose Jacob (7 September 2018), there are three different services: short wave (plus FM relays), medium wave and FM 103.6 MHz. On medium wave, AIR Shillong broadcasts in primary languages of Meghalaya (Khasi, Garo and Jaintia) as well as English and Hindi. The FM station is an outlet for FM Rainbow.

The following article is based on a two week monitoring project (28 August-10 September, listening to as many hours of the station as possible (except weekends due to family obligations). The web site www.airshillong.org, established in 2009 as one of the first web sites of Indian regional stations, is not available any more. So one of the purposes was to establish a general schedule of the programmes, which would be useful to international listeners.

Broadcast schedule

The online schedule is exactly in parallel with the official short wave schedule.

- 0025-0400 UTC: 4970 kHz
- 0656-0931 UTC: 7315 kHz
- 1056-1741 UTC: 4970 kHz

In between there is only a test tone. Transmissions start with the AIR interval signal and announcements in Hindi and English.

The standard station identification is as follows:

*“This is the North Eastern Service of All India Radio broadcasting from Shillong on short wave
- 41 m corresponding to 7315 kHz
(respectively)
- 60.36 m corresponding to 4970 kHz
and on additional FM 100.1 MHz.”*

This announcement is heard quite often. It would typically be used at the beginning and the end of the three programme blocks. It is also used when the continuity announcer is standing by for the Delhi news or giving the previews of programmes for the day/evening (0055, 1125, 1430 UTC). Finally, it is also heard during the music shows.

Even if the programme announcements say a programme is at the full or half hour they almost always seem to run late. This is not necessarily a problem of negligence, more probably this is due to digital processing and signal routes until the feed is available to the online listener. There are, however, time spans when it seems impossible to establish exact times because advertising or public service announcements (e. g. against domestic violence) are thrown in. My prime examples would be the time spans 0735-0800 and 1300-1510 h UTC.

0025-0400 UTC/6-9:30 a. m. IST “morning transmission”

(Mo-Fr schedule)

- IS, Vande Mataram, IDs, indigenous music
- 0030-0040 news from Delhi: Hindi, 0035 English
- 0040-0200 devotional music (tribal, Hindu, Christian), including programme announcements and short features
- 0200-0225 moderated Hindi film music, 0225 advertising/PSA announcements/AIR promotional material (“Ragam” channel, web channels)
- 0230-0300 news from Delhi: Samachar Prabhat in Hindi. 0245 Morning News in English
- 0300-0305 North East Bulletin in English from the Regional News Unit of AIR Shillong
- 0305-0359 Western music (request programme moderated in English), sometimes replaced with topical programmes
- English headline news (RNU), c/d announcements

0656-0931 UTC/12:30-3 p. m. IST: “afternoon transmission”

(Mo-Fr schedule)

- IS, IDs and announcements
- 0700-0735 Western music (“Siesta”, but also request programme moderated in English heard)
- 0735-0800 variable, but it seems that this is a time span when North Eastern music is included
- 0800-0830 Hindi music (request programme moderated in Hindi)
- 0830-0900 news from Delhi: “Midday News” in English. 0845 “Dopahar Samachar” in Hindi
- 0900-0930 Hindi music (request programme moderated in Hindi)

1056-1741/ 4:30-11:10 p. m. IST: “evening transmission”

(Mo-Fr schedule)

- IS, IDs and announcements
- 1100-1125 North Eastern music
- 1125-1130 station ID and programme preview in Hindi and English
- 1130-1140 news from Delhi: Hindi, 1130 “5 p. m. news in English”
- 1140-1200 Hindi music

- 1200-1230 Western music
- 1230-1300 news from Delhi (not always heard), followed by Western music programme
- 1300-1510 unclear line-up:
it seems there are regularly scheduled segments which are dropped on some days for monthly/weekly/extraordinary programmes e. g. 5 September special on the Indian Teachers' Day and monthly programme on literature, 7 September "monthly radio bridge": panel on minorities' welfare
 - about 1315-1335 Youth programmes in English (e. g. drug prevention, adolescence counselling), Hindi (e. g. internet addiction) or an NE language (in this case sounding like religious songs performed by a youth group)
 - 1335-1400 NE programme
 - 1400 possibly another NE topical programme
 - 1430-1435 programme preview in Hindi and English
 - 1435-1440 sports news from Delhi
 - around 1510 regional "evening headlines"/ "headlines for today" in English (probably the same as in the morning)
- 1515-1545 news from Delhi: "Samachar Sandhya" in Hindi. 1530 "News at Nine" in English
- 1545-1600 Hindi pop music
- 1600-1630 Western music (request programme moderated in English), but also other programmes in English or Hindi heard
- 1630-1700 announcer's choice: Hindi pop music
- 1700-1730 announcer's choice: English pop music (some programmes heard were moderated, some had non-stop music)
- 1730-1740 news from Delhi English. 1735 Hindi
- 1741 c/d announcements in Hindi/English

News

The North Eastern service broadcasts all three main AIR news broadcasts of the day in Hindi and English. The main news bulletins are also the main source of the items in the five minute bulletins from Delhi.

- 0230-0300 "Samachar Prabhat" in Hindi and "Morning News" (including press review) in English
- 0830-0900 "Midday News" in English and "Dopahar Samachar" in Hindi
- 1515-1545 "Samachar Sandhya" in Hindi and "News at Nine" in English

Judging from audio clips and names of people/cities/countries mentioned, the items are identical. The North Eastern service also takes five minute newscasts in Hindi and English from Delhi as well as the English sports update (1435 UTC).

During the Asian Games (18 August to 2 September 2018 in Indonesia) there were summaries of the performance of Indian competitors at 1700-1730 UTC. These programmes at times provided a wild mix of languages, when athletes were asked in English and replied in Hindi or another regional language or conveyed personal greetings in their mother languages. Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore, once a successful participant in the Olympic games, becoming Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting in 2014 and Cabinet minister for Youth Affairs

and Sports in 2017, was pleased with the performance especially of participants of more backwards regions of India.

One of the advantages of listening to international radio is comparing the news with the reporting on your domestic sources of news. The focus of the AIR news is, not surprisingly, on India's domestic affairs and international relations, but you will also find some international sport (e.g. Tennis US Open). One country often mentioned is Pakistan or rather its role as an international troublemaker (sponsor of terrorism). The counterpart would be Radio Pakistan's reporting on Kashmir (people being "martyred" by Indian authorities). In German, we have the word "Erbfeindschaft" which suggests that an enmity is part of the DNA of a country, but the example of France and Germany may give hope that this "Erbfeindschaft" may eventually come to an end.

I found two items particularly interesting: On 6 September, India's Supreme Court de-criminalised consensual gay sex. This "landmark ruling" (AIR news) was also reported internationally (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-45429664>, <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/09/06/asia/india-gay-sex-ruling-intl/index.html>). Interestingly, the law now changed by the court was referred to as a "colonial law" (CNN too: "an archaic law imposed during British rule"). If this article was against the century old traditions of Indian society, India would have plenty of time to change this law since independence. So what is the reasoning behind referring to the article as "colonial". Another item of interest was about the authorities' successfully defending India's borders against unwanted Rohingya immigration. The Rohingya are a Muslim minority in Myanmar fleeing the "ethnic cleansing" (UN) in Myanmar.

At times, for a non native English speaker, it is difficult to judge, whether there is a bias in the wording or not. For example: In German, both "privilege" (mostly: undeserved) and "regime" (mostly: oppressive) have a negative connotation. When hearing the word "privileges" the author immediately wondered whether the news author should have written "benefits". Maybe bias is more obvious in "previous regime" instead of "previous government". This was used in a news item about the ruling party and its new election programme. The author wondered anyway about the absence of opposition politicians in the AIR news while there is regular reporting about PM Narendra Modi, Government ministers and the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) including derogatory remarks on the opposition (e. g. "corrupt", non-Indian).

Music

Music programmes come in the format of phone in's (actually more requests for a certain artist than for a particular song) and "announcer's choice"-programmes without listeners' participation (some moderated, others non stop). Western, Hindi (film) and North Eastern music programmes are completely separated. So reception reports could and should clearly specify the music genre. Judging from the states where English speaking callers called from, the music shows have an audience not only in the North Eastern states but across Northern India. Although the platform is not routinely mentioned, they probably listen via fixed or mobile internet applications.

The vast majority of English songs will appeal to the tastes and dreams of a young audience. This may also be true for the Hindi songs while the texts might be less explicit. The contents of the English (and supposedly the Hindi film) songs will be in sharp contrast to the content of the songs in North Eastern languages. There was a programme with NE songs in which the topics of the songs were mentioned. For example one song was praising the scenery of a landscape while another one called for joined efforts to develop a NE state (in this case Arunachal Pradesh).

Feature programmes

At times, scheduled programmes will be pre-empted for monthly/weekly programmes or current events. The following examples are selected with the view, that the service claims to be "North Eastern".

On 5 September, there was a monthly programme on “literature”. Some “poems” reflected an NE tribal author’s feelings about being forced in to a foreign world while longing for the better life of his youth. If you compare the amount of English/Hindi programming with the NE language segments of the North Eastern service this world is certainly “overwhelming”.

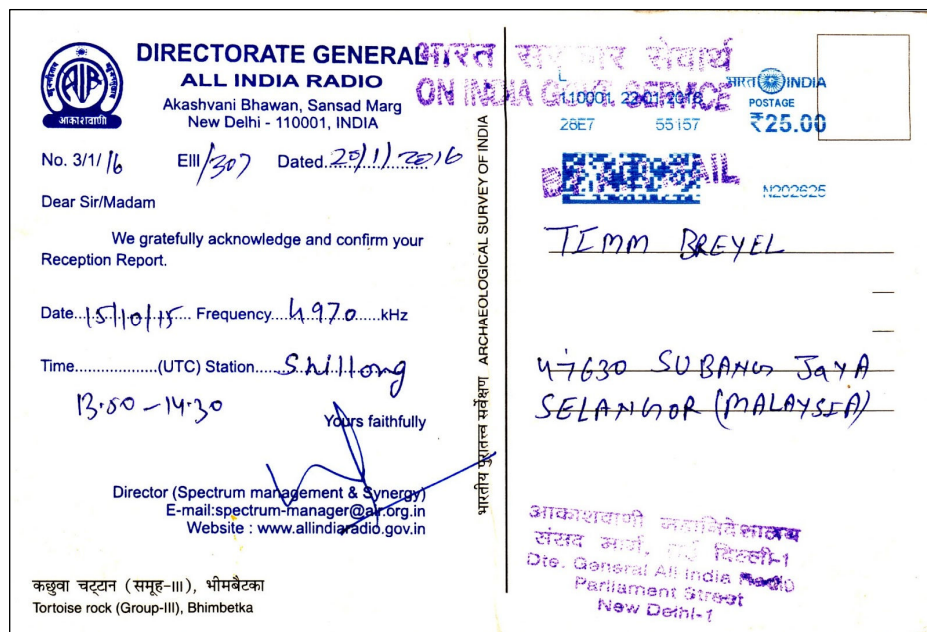
On 7 September, I heard a “monthly radio bridge” with the participants from Mizoram, Manipur, Meghalaya and Assam discussing minorities’ welfare programmes in their respective states. The panel finally agreed that their agencies would do “justice” to the needs of the respective minorities. (What else would you expect?)

A different cord was struck with programmes on the Second World War (5 September: Interview in English on the Battle of Imphal, 6 September programme in Hindi on military cemeteries in the region). In 1944 the Japanese military expansion into Asia suffered its Stalingrad in India’s North East.

Closing remarks: A service from the North East, rather than for the North East

Being unable to listen on weekends, when the service might have more indigenous programmes, I find it surprising that the service is dominated by English and Hindi music programmes and central news from Delhi. There is less reference to Meghalaya and the North Eastern states than I expected. When compared to the streams of FM Gold, FM Rainbow or Vividh Bharati, the mix of the North Eastern Service may prove commercially viable within certain additional target groups of the Indian society. Given the many phone in programmes, one might think of a telecom provider as name sponsor, but I not an advisor...

(Dr Hansjoerg Biener 10 September 2018)



QSL Verification for AIR Shillong on 4970 kHz received by Timm Breyel.

(courtesy:

<http://shortwavedxer.blogspot.com/2015/11/all-india-radio-shillong.html>)

