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Extracts from the speech by Mr. Satyanarayan Sinha, Minister of Information and Broadcasting, in the Lok Sabha on 18.3.64

First of all, I would like to take up the question which has been introduced in this House on the cut motion moved by my hon. friend from Rajkot, Shri Masani. I am sorry he is not here, but he has sent a letter to me that on account of some important previous engagement he had to leave for Bombay last night and therefore would not be present here. He wants, first, that this AIR organisation should be converted into some kind of autonomous organisation. It is a very old question and not one coming up for the first time; perhaps during the course of the past twelve years more than once this question came up before the House. Shri Masani has conceded that the AIR is doing fairly good work. He has also said that the AIR has established a kind of impartiality, and free from political bias it has been functioning so far. Still he has said, honestly, that he does not want any kind of government control. I quite appreciate it, because the hon. Member belongs to a party the philosophy of which is no control, at least no government control. And he is honest that way. Therefore it was an academic question for him that he should have raised this point also.

He has tried to make out that so far as this AIR is concerned, if the income from customs, excise and other things should be added, it would be viable. Yes, I do agree. But perhaps one thing he has missed, namely, that though it may be viable that way, it will be difficult for any autonomous organisation to find the large amount of money which is needed for capital projects. This organisation is still in its infancy, if I may say so, when compared to other broadcasting houses, broadcasting houses of other big countries. And that is also one of the main reasons, that unless this broadcasting institution is fully developed, it will not, I think, serve the purpose which the hon. Member may have in view when he suggested that it may be transformed or converted into this kind of autonomous organisation.

So far as the principle of the matter is concerned, Government is committed to it, and Shri Masani himself pointed out, that in the agreement signed with these staff artistes and other people the mention made is that if and when it will be transformed into an autonomous organisation their services will be automatically transferred to that organisation.

But apart from the financial question, people are perhaps ultra-sensitive about this Department. All of us are aware of it. And in the present situation of this country, both political and economic, I do not think that Parliament should divest itself of that kind of control which it is exercising today on this Department. What do we find today? If anything goes wrong, any little thing, minor things, here on the AIR, the Minister is contacted informally and also in the Lobby and the Chamber; and Members, not being satisfied, table short-notice question, long-notice question, raise half-an-hour discussion, two-and-half-hours discussion; and every year we have to appear before the whole House for getting these Demands voted where the minutest scrutiny is done; then at the time of the Supplementary Demands; all kinds of things; and through the Estimates Committee, through the Public Accounts Committee. They have such kind of control. And I do concede, it is very necessary. This cannot be achieved if this organisation is made into an ~~xxx~~ autonomous organisation.

The third thing is, as I said, during the emergency, my own opinion is that

even if this organisation should have been an autonomous organisation, when the emergency came it would have been taken over by the Government. There is no question about it. In the very nature of things it cannot be otherwise. The large number of Members who took part in the discussion last year as well as this year have paid this compliment that so far as the work of the AIR is concerned, with the on set of the emergency they immediately switched on to programmes that were necessary and suitable for the emergency. The entire machinery was geared up. It would have been impossible if this organisation had been an autonomous organisation.

Therefore, on all these three counts — financial, political and also because of the emergency — the question of this organisation being converted into an autonomous organisation, at least for the time being, does not arise. I would, therefore, beg of hon. Members not to talk of this at least so long as the emergency continues in this country (Interruption).

The second point which the hon. Member tried to make was with regard to television. There are no two opinions regarding the importance of television as a medium of information, education and also entertainment. If this television has to be spread over the entire country, a big country like ours, it will mean crores and crores of rupees. It will mean not only our money but a lot of foreign exchange also. Of course, we have started with a miniature form of television in Delhi. Even people who have come from outside, experts from those countries where television is working very satisfactorily, are fully satisfied with the kind of work which we are doing. But the question is, if you have to take television over the entire country and also have all kinds of television, in the present financial circumstances of the country we cannot do it. Therefore, we have to make a choice. Some hon. Members suggested that if it is a commercial thing, if it is a sponsored thing, it can be done. But the opinion in this matter, apart from the opinion of the Government, amongst the hon. Members of this House, is sharply divided. (Interruption.) The hon. lady Member opposite spoke strongly against it. I want to make one thing clear so that there need be no misapprehension about it. So far as All India Radio is concerned, there is no question of commercialising it. We can never think of it. The only question that arises is with regard to television. Though it is a very necessary thing the Government, in the present circumstances of our country, could not give this scheme a very high priority. Therefore, the matter stands where it was. The only thing is, if this House takes a decision and the Government also decides as a matter of high policy, then we have to make a choice between the two. I must make it quite clear that in the foreseeable future you cannot have television in the country unless and until you decide, you make a choice, you weigh in the balance the advantages and disadvantages of having this television by making it a commercialised venture or going without it. There is no other reply to this. Therefore, I would like to tell the House my own opinion in this matter. I may have no opinion in this matter, but I keep my mind absolutely open. Hon. Members know it. I have not got this kind of fad, as somebody said, or that kind of fad. I am always open to conviction. If I am convinced with the advantages of having television even if it is sponsored — other countries are there — I will be in favour of it. I have not studied the thing minutely, and therefore I cannot tell you about it. I can only say that so far as I am concerned I keep my mind open. If I am convinced I will certainly throw my weight, what little weight I have, in favour of it. But I have to be convinced of the advantages with regard to this matter.