
CURRY ON HAMMING: Amateur Radio in India

By Thomas E King
VK2ATJ

In this small town in north western India such an occurrence was a major media event and reporters came in droves. A spy story would have made terrific headlines, but no story appeared at all, as the man was able to document that he was an amateur radio operator licensed by the Wireless Planning and Coordination Wing of the Ministry of Communications. Neither the police nor any of the reporters had previously heard about amateur radio.

Today there is a training course for would-be amateurs in the Punjab!

This incident is not an isolated event as nearly all Indian government officials outside the WPC are unaware of amateur radio, or that their own government allows private licensing of radio equipment. A normal response to a question posed about amateur radio in India (and in most other developing or third world countries) is "that sort of activity isn't allowed in this country". Government officials often look upon the private use of a transmitter in a developing country as an anti-social activity.

Fortunately, the Prime Minister of India, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, is one of the better informed public officials on amateur radio as there are two amateurs in her family. Her son Rajiv is an amateur, VU2RG as is his Italian-born wife, Sonia, VU2SON.

While the growth of amateur radio in India hasn't been spectacular there are far more amateurs in this country than in all of its neighbours combined. The total

In June of 1980, an Indian working in Iran fled a rapidly changing country. He made his way through Pakistan and to his home in Julandar Punjab, where he set up his amateur radio equipment complete with aerial. It wasn't long before the police came to the house, and despite providing evidence that he was a licensed radio amateur, the young man was arrested as a spy and taken to gaol.

amateur population in Burma, Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka numbers well under 100.

January 1, 1923 is regarded as the starting point for amateur radio in India. At that time there were 20 British licence holders in the former colony. The first licence issued to an Indian was in 1925 when Lokendra Bos VU2AG, was recommended for an experimenter's permit by Sir J.C. Bose, a Nobel Laureate. (It is said that Marconi himself was enthusiastic

about this nomination). With that licence VU2AG became the first ham in Calcutta and the first OM in an Indian amateur world which is almost exclusively male. It's almost exclusively male — but not quite — because there are over 100 YLs in India, nearly a fifth of them are in New Delhi, the country's capital of four million.

Delhi has a total amateur population of about 80 hams of which some 30 are foreigners holding reciprocal licenses, while Bombay's ham community numbers about 100. Madras also has about 100 hams and India's largest city of Calcutta has only 20 hams for a metropolitan population well over seven million people. Bangalore, a pleasant industrial city in the south and home of many electronics companies, has about 150 amateurs and a very progressive radio club offering technical assistance and training classes.

Clubs

Many Indian amateurs are involved in clubs. They receive their morse and theory training through clubs and after passing the licence exam often continue their club involvement because of technical and social benefits.

Members of the Delhi Radio Club, for example, can use the home brew equipment licensed as VU2ARS. Sundays at the club have become a social session, as well, and