

Sunrise Radio – Greater London
Sunrise FM - Bradford
Radio Excel - Birmingham
Sabras Radio - Leicester
Asian Sound Radio - East Lancashire

16 February 2001

The Rt Hon Chris Smith MP
Secretary of State
Department for Culture Media & Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street
London SW1Y 5DH

Dear Secretary of State

This letter comes to you from five Asian commercial radio services.

We are writing to you as a group in response to your request for views on the proposed extension of the BBC's Asian Network via the BBC national digital radio multiplex. We are aware that the Commercial Radio Companies Association is in the process of commenting on all the BBC's proposed services but we wanted to be sure that you understood our particular concerns regarding the service that is most likely to have an adverse affect on our stations' livelihoods and thus the services that we offer.

Output

First, we fully understand and accept that Asian licence fee payers have a right to expect output designed specifically for them to be made available by the BBC. We suggest, however, that this money does not necessarily need to be spent on providing an Asian radio service. A greater BBC endeavour for Asian licence fee payers on television might be preferred. If an Asian radio service is approved, then it should supplement and complement the provisions made available by the commercial radio sector. Our constituencies are important but small by comparison with, for example, the broad population that might appreciate a top 40 music-based service. The markets to which we appeal are thus more fragile.

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The formats which form part of our licences with the Radio Authority are each marginally different from the others. Each of our areas is different in its ethnic makeup and our output reflects these nuances. All of us, however, must broadcast reasonably high proportions of speech depending on the time of day. The broadcast of local news and news of the Indian Sub-Continent is crucial to all of us. Our stations tend to be broad in their appeal. We do not concentrate on young people. Our audience is made up of families and adults over the age of 24. That being said, it is true that we broadcast a good deal of music and our services are more satisfying to listeners under the age of 50. We think the BBC Asian radio service (if approved) should not replicate what we do and the Asian community at large would best be served by a BBC radio service that concentrated on Asian listeners over 50 and broadcast a high proportion of speech. More than 60% speech at peak-time would seem to be appropriate. There are inevitably minorities that merit greater attention from broadcasters because they are low in number in any one area but spread widely within the community at large. Pushto speaking Pathans are one such group that would welcome greater attention from any new service.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss directly with you and your officials the means which you will use to ensure that any prescriptions that you lay down for the Asian network will be adhered to. Bearing in mind that the approval seems to rest with you and your Department, we are not sure how prompt action could be taken in the event of the BBC circumventing any format promises that we hope you will require.

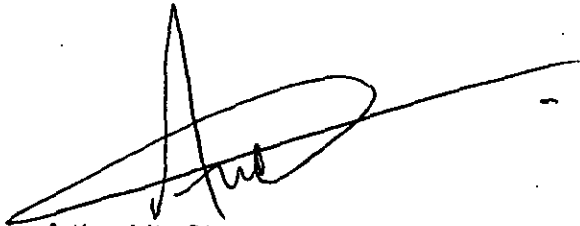
Commercial Activities

Our services are commercially funded while the BBC's (if approved) will not be. The BBC, however, is self-regulating and some of the activity that BBC Asian broadcasters and management are inclined to undertake has an adverse affect on our ability to raise money from advertising. These are sensitive matters but we are able to demonstrate how the BBC tends to encourage local Asian businesses, particularly those in the entertainment area, to make available prizes and other privileges in return for editorial. This

enables those Asian businesses that oblige in this respect to avoid using paid for airtime to communicate with potential consumers.

We hope that you will give us the opportunity to discuss all these matters in person.

Yours sincerely



Avtar Lit, Chief Executive
Sunrise Radio - Greater London

On behalf of myself and:

Usha Parmar, Chief Executive
Sunrise FM - Bradford
Arun Bajaj, Managing Director
Radio Excel - Birmingham
Don Kotak, Managing Director
Sabras Radio - Leicester
Shujat Ali, Managing Director
Asian Sound Radio - East Lancashire

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PRODUCTION

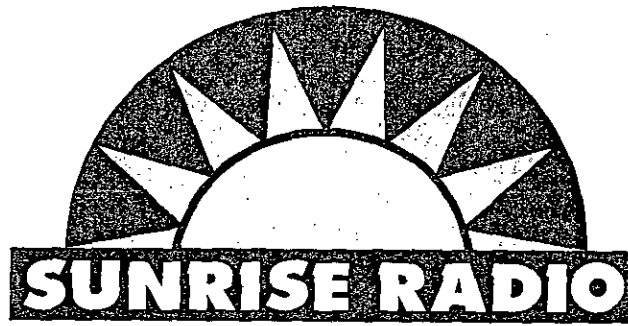
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Vanessa Brand
Head of Public Service Broadcasting Policy Branch
Department for Culture, Media and Sport
2-4 Cockspur Street
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*Received 11 September
2001.
Vanessa Brand*

19th July 2001

Dear Vanessa,

BBC proposal to launch new Digital services

Thank you for your recent communication regarding the BBC's proposals to launch digital radio services in the London area.

On reading their proposals for programming we are very surprised that they have virtually duplicated the formats in terms of a mirror image of programmes already being broadcast in the London, Leicester, Birmingham, Coventry, Wolverhampton, Manchester, Glasgow Bradford and Edinburgh, areas. Already there are 3 digital services in London and we see the situation as being somewhat repetitive copied from existing services.

The BBC has ignored the needs of cities with strong ethnic populations for over twenty years and they have left the development of radio broadcasting to the commercial sectors of ethnic communities including the Arab, Chinese, Turkish, West Indian, and Jewish communities. Now that we have seen the development in these sectors as being served by the commercial sector we see the BBC's proposals as an awful waste of licence payers money. It could be said that if the BBC really want to serve the bulk of the ethnic communities across the nation then we propose the attached programme format.

This format we implore the BBC to adopt is to serve all the ethnic communities which will indeed enable the commercial sector to co-exist. It would appear however that the BBC is on the road to killing off commercial ethnic radio and it would be prudent at this stage that they should provide something worthwhile to ethnic communities who have generously contributed to their coffers with nil return to date. Also the BBC's radio funding should be structured so it has some relationship with the listener base it attracts.

In all the years the BBC Asian Network has existed they have not developed a single new programme format. It has been very apparent to us that alot of their current programming has been copied from Sunrise Radio. I'd urge the BBC to leave alone what is and has been done successfully already.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tony Patti', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mr. Tony Patti
Programme Director