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Airwaves on the LoC – Community Radio, Border Communities, and India's Information Gaps

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SUBJECTS COVERED**POLITY****SECURITY & DEFENCE****SOCIAL ISSUES****CURATED & WRITTEN BY****Bharat Choudhary**

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WHY IN NEWS

The Indian Army launched Radio Sangam on 88.8 FM at Keri village, Doongi block, Rajouri district, J&K — India's first community radio station along the Line of Control. The station aims to bridge information gaps and build trust between the military, civil administration, and border communities in an area that has seen persistent insurgency and cross-border tensions.

COMMUNITY RADIO IN INDIA — THE POLICY FRAMEWORK

Community Radio Stations (CRS) are low-power, non-profit FM radio stations licensed to civil society organisations, educational institutions, and government bodies to serve specific communities. India's community radio policy has evolved through three key phases:

Pre-2006: Private broadcasting was banned under the Telegraph Act 1885 and the Indian Wireless Telegraphy Act 1933. All radio broadcasting was a government monopoly under All India Radio (Akashvani) and Doordarshan (Prasar Bharati).

2006 — Community Radio Policy: The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting issued the **Community Radio Policy 2006**, which for the first time allowed eligible non-profit civil society organisations (including NGOs, educational institutions, and agriculture research organisations) to operate low-power FM stations.

2014–2024 — Expansion and liberalisation: The government gradually expanded eligibility to include Panchayati Raj Institutions (2015), tribal autonomous bodies, and disaster management authorities. As of 2024, approximately **250+ community radio stations** operate across India.

Key operational parameters:

Power: 50W–100W (effective radiated power) — coverage radius: approximately 10–15 km

Frequency band: FM (87.5–108 MHz)

Content restriction: Cannot carry news (to prevent competition with public broadcaster); can carry local weather, agriculture, health information, cultural programming

Not-for-profit mandate: CRS cannot carry commercial advertising beyond limited educational messages

Language: Operators encouraged to broadcast in local/tribal languages — critical for inclusion

RADIO SANGAM — WHY THE LOC CONTEXT MATTERS

Radio Sangam’s significance goes beyond a routine community radio launch. Rajouri district in Jammu & Kashmir sits on the Line of Control — one of the most contested and sensitive frontiers in Asia. Understanding why a community radio station here is strategically important requires understanding the information environment in border communities.

The information vacuum in LoC-adjacent areas:

LoC-adjacent villages in J&K — including in Rajouri, Poonch, and Kupwara districts — face a unique information challenge:

Pakistan’s media penetration: Pakistani radio signals (including state broadcaster Radio Pakistan and private FM stations) are audible in many LoC-adjacent villages. Absence of Indian content creates a vacuum that hostile propaganda can fill

Mobile connectivity gaps: Network blackouts (ordered during security operations) periodically cut off LoC villages from digital news and social media — making radio the only mass communication medium

Language and literacy barriers: Many border villages are Gojri-, Pahari-, or Kashmiri-speaking communities where content in the national language may not be accessible

Radio Sangam fills each of these gaps:

88.8 FM frequency covers the Rajouri area with Indian content in local languages

A physical FM signal is independent of mobile networks — resilient to network shutdowns

Content includes agricultural information relevant to farming communities, not just national news

CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS IN CONFLICT ZONES — THE “WHAM” DOCTRINE

Radio Sangam exemplifies India’s “Winning Hearts and Minds” (WHAM) approach to counter-insurgency — a doctrine that recognises military victory alone is insufficient without parallel information and development operations.

The WHAM framework in J&K:

Sadbhavana Mission: Indian Army’s long-running goodwill initiative in J&K (since 1994); includes education centres, medical camps, vocational training, infrastructure construction

Project BEACON: Army-run school education initiative for border area children

Good Samaritan Policy: Army personnel assisting injured civilians

Radio Sangam: The newest information dimension of WHAM

Why information operations matter:

Insurgencies are sustained by three conditions: grievance, organisation, and communication. The Army's WHAM operations address grievance (through development) and communication (through Radio Sangam and Sadbhavana). Organisation — terrorist networks — is addressed through kinetic operations.

The Rajouri context: Rajouri district has been a zone of periodic militant infiltrations and attacks, including the Dhangri village attack (January 1, 2023) that killed 7 civilians. The district's complex ethnic composition — Gujjars, Paharis, Dogras, and others — and its proximity to the LoC make it a focal point for both security operations and counter-insurgency development work.

ALL INDIA RADIO AND MINORITY LANGUAGE BROADCASTING

Radio Sangam must be understood alongside the broader context of **All India Radio (AIR/Akashvani)** and its role in border and minority language broadcasting.

AIR's mandate: AIR (under Prasar Bharati) operates 500+ broadcasting centres and transmitters. Its **Vividh Bharati** service carries entertainment; its **News Services Division** operates 24/7 news broadcasts. AIR has a specific mandate to broadcast in tribal and border area languages.

Thadou language crisis (concurrent news in January 2026): Simultaneously with Radio Sangam's launch, Prasar Bharati was moving to restore Thadou language broadcasts in Imphal — disrupted since the May 2023 Manipur ethnic violence. This parallel news item illustrates the consistent challenge: ethnic tensions and conflict disrupt the very minority language broadcasting infrastructure that is supposed to help manage those tensions.

The broader pattern:

Northeast India: AIR operates stations in Kohima, Imphal, Itanagar, Agartala, Shillong — broadcasting in dozens of languages. But operational continuity depends on staff safety and political stability

J&K: AIR Srinagar and AIR Jammu serve the Union Territory; Radio Sangam adds a hyper-local LoC layer

Andaman & Nicobar: AIR Port Blair serves the islands; CRPF radio for remote settlements

UPSC RELEVANCE

Prelims: Radio Sangam (Rajouri; Keri village; 88.8 FM; January 2, 2026; first LoC community radio; Indian Army); Community Radio Policy (2006; MIB; 50-100W power; 250+ CRS); All India Radio/Akashvani (Prasar Bharati; 500+ stations); Sadbhavana Mission (Army; since 1994; J&K); Rajouri district (J&K; LoC; Gujjar/Pahari communities).

Mains GS-2: Civil-military relations in internal security operations — WHAM doctrine and development-oriented counter-insurgency | Prasar Bharati's role in minority language broadcasting and national integration | Community radio policy — regulatory framework, limitations, and potential.

Mains GS-3: Information as an instrument of counter-insurgency — soft power in conflict zones | Media infrastructure in border and remote areas — policy gaps and recommendations.

★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA
RADIO SANGAM:

Location: Keri village, Doongi block, Rajouri district, J&K
 Frequency: 88.8 FM
 Launch: January 2, 2026 (Indian Army)
 Significance: First community radio station along the Line of Control (LoC)
 Content: Agriculture, local news, cultural programmes, awareness

COMMUNITY RADIO POLICY, INDIA:

Year: 2006 (MIB — Ministry of Information and Broadcasting)
 Earlier policy: No private/civil society radio allowed (pre-2006)
 Power: 50W-100W (effective radiated power); ~10-15 km coverage
 Eligible entities: Educational institutions, NGOs, PRIs, tribal bodies (since 2014-15 amendments)
 Content restriction: No news; allowed: agriculture, health, education, cultural, weather
 Stations: ~250+ as of 2024
 Frequency: FM band (87.5-108 MHz)

PRASAR BHARATI AND AIR:

Prasar Bharati: Public broadcaster; statutory body (Prasar Bharati Act 1990); governs AIR + Doordarshan
 AIR (Akashvani): 500+ broadcasting centres; 24 languages and 146 dialects
 News Services Division (NSD): 24/7 multi-language news under AIR
 Vividh Bharati: AIR's entertainment channel
 Samachar/News: AIR's main national news bulletin

SADBHAVANA MISSION (INDIAN ARMY IN J&K):

Launched: 1994 (post-insurgency height in J&K)
 Activities: Education centres, medical camps, vocational training, infrastructure
 Project BEACON: Army-run schools in border villages
 Good Samaritan Policy: Army assistance to injured civilians

RAJOURI DISTRICT — SECURITY CONTEXT:

Division: Jammu Division, J&K UT
 LoC proximity: Shares LoC with Pakistan-administered Kashmir (Pir Panjal range separates from Valley)
 Key event: Dhangri village attack, January 1, 2023 — 7 civilians killed by militants
 Community composition: Gujjars (Scheduled Tribe), Paharis, Dogras

OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

Line of Control (LoC): ~740 km; demarcated by Simla Agreement 1972; separates India-administered J&K from Pakistan-administered J&K
 WHAM (Winning Hearts and Minds): Counter-insurgency doctrine; used by Indian Army, US Army in Afghanistan/Iraq, British Army; combines kinetic operations with development and information outreach
 Manipur ethnic violence (May 2023): Triggered by clashes between Meitei and Kuki communities; ongoing into 2026; caused displacement including Thadou language broadcast staff from Imphal AIR

Radio Pakistan: Pakistan's state broadcaster; FM signals audible in some LoC-adjacent Indian villages

Sources: AffairsCloud, PIB, Ministry of I&B, Indian Army

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