AHM Bazlur Rahman, the CEO of Bangladesh NGOs Network for Radio and Communications (BNNRC). "Around 200 organisations applied for establishing community radios following the information ministry's circular. Three committees, namely national regulatory committee, technical sub-committee and central monitoring committee sorted out 116 and sent those to the home ministry for security clearance. The 14 radios running across the country now were approved and there are more in the pipeline." Rahman adds that two more radios have been approved recently at Bhola and Hatia islands.

Krishi Radio is administered by the Agriculture Information Services (AIS) under the ministry of agriculture. It is easier for government ministries to take the initiative to establish a radio station unlike the regular process for other non-government organisations, says Dr Zahangir Alam, the farm broadcasting officer at AIS. He says that the radio is trying to address the needs of the grassroots-level people, including those who have livestock, non-agro farms etc.



PHOTO: RASHED SUMON

Damages due to Cyclone Mahasen could be minimised for the vigilance of community radios.

"We have seen our programmes and advice making spectacular changes in farming," says Alam, also the former national project director of the radio. "We are preparing proposals to apply for setting up more radio stations in vulnerable areas and places with special needs, such as the hill tracts, famine-prone and waterlogged areas, the islands in the Bay of Bengal. We are preparing the proposals soon to be submitted to the ministry," he adds.

Agriculture development activist Shykh Seraj thinks it is long due that the government allocate funds and initiate more community radios, even

If one programme, Mati o Manush, could stir the country, a round-the-clock TV channel can bring revolutionary changes in agriculture

community TV channels to support local communities, particularly regarding agriculture. "One government-owned radio channel doesn't suffice the needs of all farmers across the country. It cannot inform the farmers about area-specific knowledge considering climatic differences in the north and the south. More community radios should play an important role here. For instance, the adverse effects of Mahasen could be averted and minimised for the vigilance of these community media," he reminds.

In a similar note, Seraj also addresses the need for a TV channel devoted to agriculture and the government's apathy towards making it a success. "The government has lately given approval to many entertainment-centric commercial media channels. If one programme, Mati o Manush, could stir the country, a round-the-clock TV channel can bring revolutionary changes in agriculture," he recommends.

The 14 community radios reportedly reach out to almost 47 lakh people. As Seraj suggests, the government can mull over establishing more of these radios, keeping in mind the radios' useful roles in development, agriculture and support during the recent cyclone. If the prohibition on commercial advertisement is retained, development advertisement can fund these radios while creating a room for employment for the local people. As the activist suggests, the government is mainly liable to establish these using state funds so that these non-commercial and not-for-profit media continues to remain as the true voice of the people living in the fringes. ■