



Submission No 13

Inquiry into Australia's relationship with India as an emerging world power

Organisation: The Australian National University

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The Secretary
Inquiry into Australia's relationship with India as an emerging world power
Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT 2600

Inquiry into Australia's relationship with India as an emerging world power

Dear Sir/Madam:

Please accept the following as a submission to the inquiry.

As recognition of the growing importance of India, the ANU College of Asia and the Pacific is exploring various research links with colleagues in India, ASEAN, China and Japan. These are likely to bear their first fruit with a conference in Singapore on 16-16 October on ASEAN-Australia-India links. Further consultations and research are intended to grow from this.

Having said this, however, I would draw the Committee's attention to the depletion of expertise about India and its region in Australia over the past 15 years. This condition is little changed since it was documented in *Maximizing Australia's Asia Knowledge* (Melbourne: Asian Studies Association of Australia, 2002), pp. 22-3.

<http://coombs.anu.edu.au/ASAA/http://coombs.anu.edu.au/ASAA/>

Among Australian universities in 2006, only La Trobe University offers a politics subject devoted to the study of India/South Asia. Modern history of the region is available only at La Trobe, Monash, Tasmania, UNSW, Curtin and Macquarie.

There is a paradox in this, since state governments, such as Victoria and Queensland, have recently opened business offices in Indian cities. In Queensland, however, no university has a commitment to the study of the politics, history, culture or languages of South Asia.

The study of language is strikingly neglected. Hindi/Urdu is probably the second largest spoken language in the world. More than 40 per cent of India speaks it, and another 15-20 per cent works comfortably in it. Urdu is the official language of Pakistan. And 20 million Indians and Pakistanis overseas use Hindi/Urdu. Together, this is more than 500 million people. Hindi is taught as a full degree only at the ANU, with an availability at Sydney University. La Trobe University offers two years of Hindi and hosts a Hindi offering through Open Learning Australia.

It is often said that “everyone who matters in India speaks English.” This is not true, as Indian marketers, advertisers and media people are well aware. English-literate Indians amount to perhaps 5 per cent of the population – say, 60 million people. English-language daily newspaper circulation in 2002-03 was about 10 million a day. Hindi daily circulations were 32 million, and circulation in India’s ten other large languages totalled 30 million a day. (*Press in India, 2002-03*, New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2003 and see the Graph attached to this submission).

In television, these differences are even more pronounced, as Nalin Mehta’s research shows. Mehta writes:

179 Indian-owned television channels currently have licenses to broadcast from Indian soil. While the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting does not maintain a record of channels broadcasting into India from foreign soil, 65 foreign-owned channels have applied for uplinking permission from India.¹ These foreign-owned channels have always been available in the country and include channels like Star which have consistently ruled the ratings over the past 5 years. They have only applied for permission now because the government’s rules have been changed.

In addition, Doordarshan (the government-owned television organization) runs 27 channels in various languages.² Parliament has independently started two channels - Lok Sabha TV and Rajya Sabha TV - as well.

In total, we are talking about at least 273 channels that broadcast in 15 languages. (This is not counting the countless local cable channels and other foreign channels, like Al-Jazeera, which have not applied for official permission but are available).

- **Nalin Mehta**, doctoral candidate, La Trobe University, 29 May 2006.
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India and South Asia are experiencing a media explosion, which is driving up literacy rates and creating political awareness and social aspirations at an unprecedented rate. To begin to understand and interpret these processes requires a greater commitment to the study of the region than Australia is now making.

¹ The data was released on 1 March 2006. Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The entire list of channels is available on <http://www.mib.nic.in/informationb/ABOUT/frames.htm> (accessed 29 May 2006).

² Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Answer to Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 2056 (09.03.2006), <http://164.100.24.208/lsq14/quest.asp?qref=26637> (accessed 29 May 2006).

I would make two points about Australia's relationship with India/South Asia.

1. Language competence is inadequate. Far too few Australians know Hindi or Urdu. And this deficiency will increasingly affect the capacity to understand the markets of South Asia and to listen to the conversations of potential friends or enemies.

2. General understanding of the modern history and politics of the region is insufficient in the Australian population. As just one example, in 2003, an inquest into a murder in Sydney was disrupted because no one knew what to make of "the extremely rare Indian dialects of Coorgi and Kannada" (*Australian*, 9 Dec. 2003, p. 6). Yet Kannada is one of India's 18 official languages, spoken by close to 40 million people. It is the state language of Karnataka; Bangalore, India's computer centre, is the capital of Karnataka.

The paucity of education about the region – particularly at the university and think-tank level – costs money. It leads to poor decisions, because decision-makers are ill-equipped to judge the people with whom they are dealing and the political and social environments of India in which they are working. The costly failed endeavour of the late Kerry Packer to tie up with Indian business may be one such example.³

Recommendations

There are three partial remedies for these deficiencies, one of which carries no financial cost.

1. Leadership. If a few Australians in public life regularly called for the study of the region and its languages, this alone would have an important influence on education authorities and students from primary to secondary.

Recommendations 6 and 7 in See *Maximizing Australia's Asia Knowledge*, <http://coombs.anu.edu.au/ASAA/http://coombs.anu.edu.au/ASAA/> provide two other constructive steps:

2. A targeted program for renewal of South Asian expertise and research capacity in universities (Recommendation 6).

3. An adequately resourced national system for the teaching of Hindi/Urdu which would make the language available throughout Australia and, indeed, worldwide (Recommendation 7).

³ "Packer foray into Indian TV collapses," *AM*, ABC Radio, 22 June 2001 (Jonathan Harley) <http://www.abc.net.au/am/stories/s317139.htm> (accessed 31 May 2006).

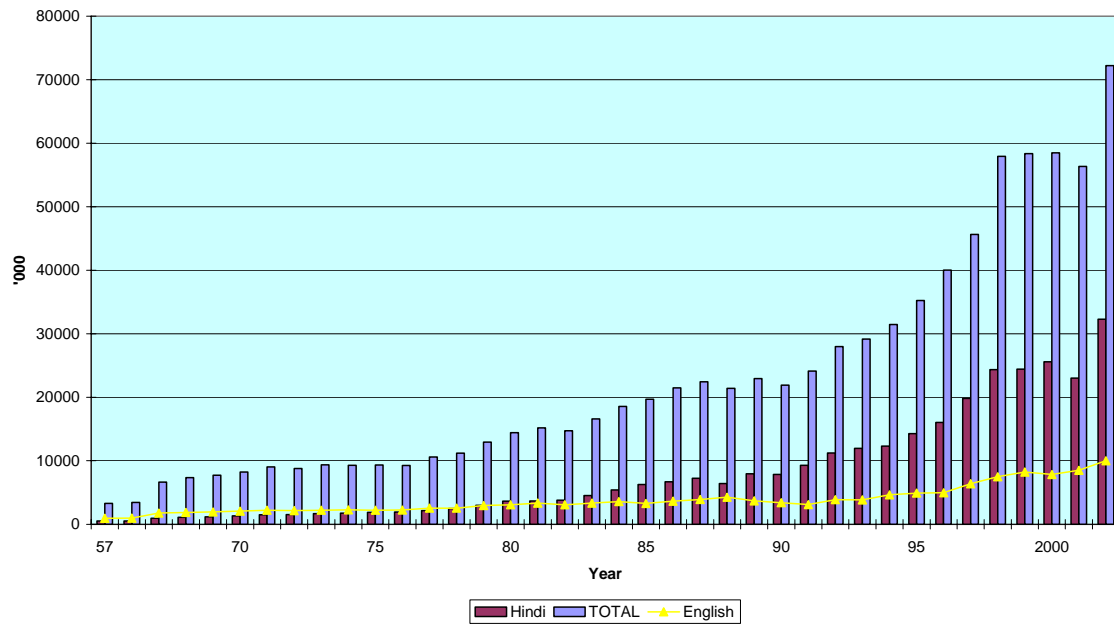
Both Nalin Mehta and I would be happy to discuss any aspect of this letter with the committee, should it wish us to do so.

Yours sincerely,

Robin Jeffrey

Attachments: a) *Graph*: Indian Daily Circulations, All, Hindi, English, 1957-2003
b) *Table*: Indian Television News Broadcasters, 2006

Indian Daily Circulations: All, Hindi, English, 1957-2003



Indian Television News Broadcasters, 2006⁴

| <i>Language</i> | <i>Channels that broadcast news</i> | <i>24-hour news networks</i> |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------|---|
| All | 116 | 56 |
| Malayalam | 11 | 3 |
| Bengali | 9 | 5 |
| Telugu | 10 | 4 |
| Kannada | 7 | 1 |
| English | 15 | 14 (6 of these are foreign networks) |
| Tamil | 11 | 2 |
| Marathi | 4 | 1 |
| Urdu | 1 | - |
| Oriya | 2 | - |
| Hindi | 25 | 19 |
| Punjabi | 6 | 2 |
| Gujarati | 3 | 1 |
| Nepali | 1 | 1 |
| Assamese/Manipuri | 2 | - |

⁴ The list includes private and government television channels. All the channels are predominantly Indian-owned, except those in the English language. The English genre is inflated because it includes 6 foreign news networks - CNN, BBC, DW TV, ABC Asia-Pacific, Euro News and Channel News Asia.