

Expanding BBC to launch news service for North Koreans

LONDON: The BBC will launch a radio and online news service for audiences in North Korea as it seeks to expand its global reach to 500 million people by 2022, the British broadcaster said Wednesday.



The ambitious plan will see the BBC create radio programmes as well as online and social media content in Korean, aimed at audiences in the secretive country, which imposes tight controls on access to information and media coverage.

Strict censorship means that North Koreans have to resort to illicit, tech-savvy measures to access foreign broadcasts such as the US-funded Voice of America and Radio Free Asia.

The BBC announcement, which comes as other state-sponsored broadcasters such as Qatar's Al-Jazeera, China's CCTV and RT (previously Russia Today) expand their footprint, could risk upsetting diplomatic relations between London and Pyongyang.

Fran Unsworth, the BBC's World Service director, said: "Through war, revolution and global change, people around the world have relied on the World Service for independent, trusted, impartial news.

"As an independent broadcaster, we remain as relevant as ever in the 21st Century, when in many places there is not more free expression, but less."

Foreign reporters invited to cover specific events in North Korea are subjected to very tight restrictions on access and movement.

In May, BBC reporter Rupert Wingfield-Hayes was detained, interrogated for eight hours and eventually expelled from the country over his reporting in the run-up to a rare ruling party congress. The broadcaster's latest plans include a relaunch of its Russian website.

The BBC will also launch 10 other language services in addition to Korean as it seeks to double its audience by 2022, when the World Service will celebrate its centenary.

"This is a historic day for the BBC, as we announce the biggest expansion of the World Service since the 1940s," said BBC director general Tony Hall.

The new languages are Afaan Oromo, Amharic, Gujarati, Igbo, Korean, Marathi, Pidgin, Punjabi, Telugu, Tigrinya, and Yoruba, with the first services expected to launch in 2017. The BBC World Service reaches 246 million people a week on TV, radio and digital, according to the broadcaster.

The expansion means that the BBC World Service will soon be available around the globe in 40 languages, including English.

Source: AFP

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