

BBC Arabic radio goes off air after 85 years



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London, January 29 (RHC)-- BBC Arabic Radio has gone off air after 85 years of broadcasting as part of a plan to cut costs and focus on digital programming. The corporation said it is cutting hundreds of jobs in its World Service and has been forced to make the cuts because of the United Kingdom government's imposition of a freeze on the license fee money it receives.

At least 382 jobs worldwide will be cut as the corporation focuses on digital content production amid a \$35 million funding gap.

The BBC announced in September that the Arabic language radio service was among 10 different foreign language services that would cease radio broadcasts, including the Chinese, Hindi and Persian services.

Alastair Campbell, who used to be a strategist and adviser to former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, said the UK government has had to make "very difficult choices" since the weakening of the economy due to Brexit and other factors. "I think they're very, very sad. I think that people underestimate the impact that the BBC has," Campbell told Al Jazeera, adding that it is an independent broadcaster despite its links to the British government.

“What that meant for many countries around the world is that they see this as a really important, significant source of proper news gathering,” Campbell said. “I actually think that the undermining of the BBC is at the heart of the government’s strategy.”

The Arabic language station launched on January 3, 1938, from Egypt. Hosam El Sokkari, former head of BBC Arabic, said the radio service was a “lifeline for lots of people in under privileged areas” as they listened to news via small and inexpensive devices. “Now, they would have to use much more complicated and probably more expensive devices if they want to listen or enjoy the BBC services,” El Sokkari told Al Jazeera from Cairo.

“It’s quite a sad moment ... especially that it was not only a language service, but a service where we had experimented with very early forms of interactions with audiences,” he said. Similarly, former BBC India correspondent Mark Tully described the ending of these radio services as “very sad.” “Radio is a very powerful medium, especially in South Asia,” Tully told Al Jazeera. “I’ve seen the impact of radio, and it’s quite clear that it is probably the most attractive way of communicating news,” he said.

Many took to social media to express their sadness and disappointment towards the decision. “It’s very disappointing that the BBC decided to get rid of one of its most listened-to radio services in its history. People in places like Sudan don’t have access to modern technology, and they rely on the BBC radio service, particularly the BBC arabic for their daily news,” one Twitter user wrote.

It was shocking news for “all Yemeni listeners from all over the country even the rural and remote areas,” another Twitter user wrote. “BBC radio was their only connection to the world. That’s really sad news.”

<https://www.radiohc.cu/en/noticias/internacionales/312011-bbc-arabic-radio-goes-off-air-after-85-years>



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