

Doordarshan may go BBC way

Zia Haq, Hindustan Times, New Delhi | Updated: Feb 04, 2013 02:27 IST

Doordarshan, India's drifting, sedate state broadcaster, has mattered little for most Indians. Now, even the government is beginning to tire.

Doordarshan may make a historic switch from being an archaic "state broadcaster-like entity" to a full "public broadcast service" on the lines of the UK's BBC, which is funded directly by Parliament, or the US's PBC, funded by a mix of revenue and public finance.

When state broadcasters, which are essentially mere mouthpieces of the government, are made into public broadcast services, they become more independent, credible and profitable, according to the Asia-Pacific Institute for Broadcasting Development, a think-tank.

Information and broadcasting minister Manish Tewari, suave and relatively younger at 47, has pushed for a timely re-look into what kind of Doordarshan should India have.

So, a high-level panel headed by the Prime Minister's innovations adviser on Sam Pitroda has been asked to suggest an overhaul of Prasar Bharati, which manages Doordarshan.

In a nation where TV watching is a national pastime, housewives prefer melodramatic soaps on private channels. As for news, Doordarshan and its stiff newsreaders are no longer the "golden mean" for the country's noisy political discourse.

Yet, the government spends close to Rs 1,800 crore annually on Doordarshan, but is required to maintain an "arm's length" from it.

India opened its media space in 1991, resulting in a boom of commercial broadcasters and 852 private channels are currently on air.

"Where does that leave the government? There is a need to re-appraise the role of Prasar Bharati," Tewari said.