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Front Page
Nation
Calcutta
Bengal
Foreign
Business
Sports
Horse Racing
t2
T2 Online
Opinion

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Northeast
Jharkhand
Bihar
Odisha

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7days Sun
Graphiti Sun

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Crossword
Jumble
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Sircar's parting gift: DD to auction slots

Our Special Correspondent



Jawhar Sircar

New Delhi, Oct. 17: Prasar Bharati CEO Jawhar Sircar today got the public broadcaster's board to approve a contentious programming policy to sell prime-time slots on Doordarshan, pulling off what promises to be a more financially viable model at his last meeting at the helm.

Sircar, who steps down on November 4, had requested the government to be relieved ahead of his official February retirement.

According to the new policy, prime-time slots between 7pm and 11pm will be auctioned off to producers, allowing them to create content on a par with private broadcasters and market them to advertisers - a payout model that was in practice before 2003.

Under the existing self-finance commissioning policy, producers pay only a telecast fee to Doordarshan while the marketing of the programme is left to the broadcaster.

According to official estimates, DD has lost at least Rs 500 crore since 2003 because of this policy.

The telecast fee - invariably less than what DD has been earning from revenues all these years - will now be done away with. Instead, the broadcaster will earn from the auction and won't have the headache of marketing a programme.

Some board members had opposed the new policy, saying DD would lose control over content. But Sircar said DD's "finest days were when talented external producers" telecast their serials on the DD platform and took risks, which meant they ensured their programmes were attractive. "This helped DD become a legend in those days."

Sircar said the new model would ensure that DD wouldn't lose money, at least on prime-time programmes. "Through the slot-auction policy, the national broadcaster will attract professional production houses in lieu of a share in the revenue. This will also bring greater transparency into the programming selection process," he said.

"Today was my last board meeting. It is immensely satisfying that the board cleared the proposal we have been trying to introduce since 2013."

A senior official said DD's soap operas and entertainment shows were failing to attract eyeballs. "We realise that this is primarily because the quality of programmes on DD is extremely poor."

Data from the Broadcast Audience Research Council, the TV rating agency, suggest that DD doesn't even figure among the top 10 Hindi general entertainment channels.

The official said revenues would now be generated through ads and the guarantee money pledged by producers.

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