

# We have a long way to go to revive Doordarshan: Jawhar Sircar

Prasar Bharati's outgoing CEO Jawhar Sircar on the prime-time slot auction policy, rural viewership ratings and Doordarshan's workforce



Jawhar Sircar, outgoing chief executive of Prasar Bharati.  
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**New Delhi:** Jawhar Sircar, chief executive of Prasar Bharati, is working to auction prime-time programming slots on DD National and ensure what he calls "the last phase of transparency". In a recent meeting, Prasar Bharati board gave Doordarshan an ultimatum to start the auction process by 1 November before the retirement of Sircar who is leaving on 4 November.

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In an interview, Sircar talks about the prime-time slot auction policy, rural viewership ratings and DD's workforce. Edited excerpts:

**You have said that the new prime-time auction policy is an effort to get the eyeballs back for Doordarshan. How will this policy help in turning the network around?**

In programming, where the historic mistake happened was that initially DD never paid for programmes. DD got paid for the platform. It is not DD's business to make programmes because the creativity, the flexibility, the cost or the instant decisions that are required for creative television or film programmes cannot simply exist in a government set-up.

Even if they wanted to do it, they couldn't do it. Because creativity is a constant challenge to establish new modes of thought, whereas government service is a continuous compliance with the existing narrative. They are meant for different purposes—one is meant for compliance, another is for challenges. They can't get along.

We were suddenly given the task to make programmes in 2003—we were asked to pay somebody else to make it for us. Payout began in 2003-04. Before that, the slots were sold. There were groups who decided what show would go. Sometimes the choices were right, sometimes the choices were wrong. But DD never lost a penny because we took the platform/slot fees.

DD was an agency providing a window to creativity and to private enterprises. So, there was an urge in the producers to produce. Under the commissioning/payout system, this urge was lost.

**Why has Doordarshan not been able to make a mark in rural markets, let alone urban? Where do you think the network is lacking?**

Media is a very complex, volatile world where the speed and adaptation, and learning and relearning matter the most. Unfortunately, genetic make-up of government servants is such that these essentials don't come easily. You can't blame them because it's like telling the railway engine driver to fly a plane.

They call for completely different sets of skills. The median age of an employee here is 50-55 years. I have been to more than 10 foreign public broadcasting organizations and the average age I have seen is 30-35 years. That is the first main cause. There is high turnaround in the foreign public broadcasters. People come and go.

Second is the knowledge of delivery, which requires fresh blood. The last recruitment programme was 20 years ago—1996. You cannot ask an elephant to compete with a race horse.

**Recently, the government made it mandatory for cable operators to carry 20 Doordarshan channels. Why was this action taken?**

While accounting the rural viewership data, the coverage is incomplete. It is not BARC's (Broadcast Audience Research Council India) fault as to why DD gets less coverage. It is an institutional fault. Coverage is determined by the number of TV signals. Signals will only be reflected if the genres have your channel. We have continuously been knocked off the genre by the cable operators.

Cable operators get a carriage fee from private broadcasters. DD can't pay that. So, they knock us off. I made a lot of complaints on this.

**Doordarshan recently got a full-time director general (Supriya Sahu) after almost two years. How do you think that will help the network from here?**

We have two very good director generals (Doordarshan and All India Radio). Most of the problems that Doordarshan has gone through were because there was no director general. We have had three part-time DGs (director generals) in the last two years. That was the worst phase for Doordarshan. I am personally thankful to the current board for giving full support.

**How do you think the new policies will help in reviving Doordarshan?**

That depends on a perfect partnership between DD, Prasar Bharati and the government. These are three different organizations. It's not easy. There are forces within these organizations which don't understand the procedures. If there is perfect coordination between these institutions, we can certainly revive our network. But we have a long way to go.