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TELEVISION TRAVAILS

About that fantastic Doordarshan broadcast on Republic Day...

Picture that. (AP Photo /Manish Swarup)



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Jan. 26, 2015 wasn't just another Republic Day for Prasar Bharati, the government-owned body that runs Doordarshan, India's public broadcaster.

It was the first after Narendra Modi—a politician with a penchant for picture-perfect, grandiose events—took office last year, with the Indian prime minister also hosting US president Barack Obama. Not only had no US president before Obama attended the parade in New Delhi, perhaps never before had the country—and the world—put India's celebration of democracy under such scrutiny.

As the only broadcaster responsible for transmitting the images, Prasar Bharati had to pull it off. With 107 minutes of live coverage—with thousands of soldiers, artists, schoolchildren and even a few motorcycle daredevils making their way down Rajpath—the broadcaster had to also seamlessly ensure bilingual commentary and sign language interpretation without any glitch.

It didn't help that the last time one of the world's most important heads of state, China's Xi Jinping, came to India, the broadcaster had messed up. A news reader at Prasar Bharati's television arm Doordarshan read out the [Chinese president's name](#) as “Eleven Jinping.”

Much [ridicule followed](#).

“We wanted to get rid of the Xi Jinping episode and be appreciated for our real worth,” Jawhar Sircar, Prasar Bharati's CEO, told Quartz.

But it wasn't easy.

“This year was tough,” Mahesh Joshi, the overall-in-charge of the Republic Day broadcast said in a phone interview. “We had a lot of permissions to take from the Special Protection Group (especially

with Obama in attendance) and also set up telescopic lenses to ensure smooth coverage.”



A Doordarshan camera in action at the parade. (Press Information Bureau)

In all, Prasar Bharati brought in over a 100 broadcast specialists and trained over weeks to ensure that everything went glitch-free. It employed 24 high-definition cameras, compared to 18 last year. These included three jimmy jibs (camera on a crane), six cameras at Rashtrapati Bhavan and two robotic cameras.

The placement of the two robotic cameras inside the VIP enclosure was a success: Amidst all the banter with Modi, Obama was [captured chewing gum](#) as he watched the parade.

It wasn't just millions of Indian viewers who watched the Republic Day parade on Doordarshan. The event was broadcast live for [audiences in South Asia and Australia](#), apart from a live stream via

YouTube. India's private broadcasters, as always, also depended on Doordarshan for coverage of Monday's parade.

And by all indications, Prasar Bharati and Doordarshan pulled it off.