

Doordarshan cries foul over poor ratings

New Delhi, Oct. 11: Doordarshan is upset that a new agency for rating television channels that it had helped establish is using feedback only from urban households, which the public broadcaster argues is the reason behind its poor ratings.

For the past two months, DD National has been ranked 12th or 13th among 15 general entertainment channels; DD Sports 10th among 13 sports channels; DD News eighth among 14 news channels; and DD Bharati 10th out of 11 culture channels.

Senior officials in Prasar Bharati, the parent body that operates DD and All India Radio, said this was because of "partiality" by the TV rating agency Broadcast Audience Research Council that was "hiding" data from empanelled rural homes.

The public broadcaster has now asked the Centre to intervene and sent a complaint letter to the rating agency.

"We are terribly upset that Barc is releasing only urban-centric data and, despite our nudges, it has not been releasing holistic figures," said Prasar Bharati CEO Jawhar Sircar.

"We had helped set up Barc with hope, but the outcome so far has been very disappointing. The data being released by the agency is partial and is helping private broadcasters. In rural areas, our viewership is far better, so once the overall data comes out, the scenario would turn out totally different," Sircar added.

The agency was set up last year after the majority of the country's broadcasters expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of transparency in viewership rating services provided by TV Audience Measurement (TAM) - a joint venture of AC Nielsen and Kantar Media Research.

The new agency started rolling out its weekly figures in April this year and claims to have installed viewership reading meters in about 20,000 panel homes - 55 per cent of which were to be in rural areas, according to the guidelines.

Under TAM, DD National had managed to reach among the top four general entertainment channels on a few occasions.

In a letter to Barc chief executive officer, Partho Dasgupta, Sircar has written that the public broadcaster's "patience is now wearing out."

"The present data has downgraded the very ratings of DD and PB... which is due to the present partial (urban-centric) coverage of BARC. Our patience is now wearing out," the letter said. "It is damaging our revenue prospects and hurting us financially and has affected our standing in the market."

Dasgupta told this newspaper that the decision to roll out rural data will be taken following its board meeting.

"At present our reporting is for about 55 million households in urban India that includes towns that have more than one lakh population," he said.

An official in the information and broadcasting ministry said that following the complaint from Doordarshan channels, a meeting would be called to assess why the "guidelines were not being followed in letter and spirit." The ministry has also sent a letter to Barc asking for an explanation, sources said.

Last year, the Telecom Regulatory Authority (Trai), which is also the broadcast regulator, had directed TV ratings firms to empanel a minimum of 20,000 homes for collecting viewership data and to increase this number by 10,000 every year till the figure of 50,000 is reached.

