

Doordarshan prime-time slots fail to get buyers

By *sujeet.y*

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Private television production houses are seemingly unwilling to buy Doordarshan prime-time. In an embarrassment to the public broadcaster, Prasar Bharati's much-hyped auction of its prime-time slots at Doordarshan is proving to be a non-starter, forcing it to revise the last date for submission of proposals.

Sources stated that the last date for submission has been revised to July 7 instead of June 27. It is understood that the national broadcaster has been unable to attract adequate number of producers and production houses to bid for the prime-time slots on Doordarshan.

It is learnt that in an effort to increase the playing field, the Prasar Bharati has also decided to introduce a one-time amnesty scheme for blacklisted production houses and producers. All blacklisted firms have been allowed to take part in the slot sale for prime-time as long as they clear their dues with Prasar Bharati within 90 days. "The production houses will need to submit their principal amount dues upfront while agreeing to pay interest thereafter," sources added. Prasar Bharati CEO Jawhar Sircar said, "Producers needed more time to understand the new policy and consult their accounts and legal. What's wrong? Let's face facts. Many people have suffered in the past from DD's obdurate bureaucracy and some did not believe that minor babus will have no role in the matter once the contract is signed up to 3 years. Some who benefited from present payments policy are up in arms against this first move in 12 years to introduce total transparency and stop corruption.

The slot sale policy was cleared by the Prasar Bharati Board in November last year in an effort to equip Doordarshan to take on the might of commercial television networks.

The policy was cleared as it was felt that Doordarshan's major hit series like Ramayana, Mahabharat, Hum Log, Buniyaad and Chandrakanta were produced through the slot sale method.

And the policy of acquiring content through the commissioning mode, wherein the national broadcaster pays for content creation, was discontinued as it was felt that it had not given good results.

Based on the revenue sharing model, the move was expected to attract major production houses to the national broadcaster. Through the "slot sale policy" the national broadcaster had hoped to attract professional production houses in lieu of a share in the revenue that is earned from them. However, it is understood that not many private production houses have shown keenness in participating in the process forcing the national broadcaster to extend the dates of the auction.

With the largest terrestrial reach across the country there have been attempts by the Prasar Bharati to revitalise the content in Doordarshan. The slot sale policy aims to generate revenue through advertisement time as well as the guarantee money pledged by the producer of the programme. While the producer would be able to recover his cost through half of the

advertisement time. It was felt that this policy would also help Doordarshan as it would not have to spend large amounts to acquire programmes while also ensuring that the producer maintains a high quality because of the linking of his earning with the revenue that the programme generates.

India Nitin Mahajan New Delhi

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