

Even ministries dumping DD, I&B report card fails Prasar

The Health Ministry has withdrawn Rs 100 crore it had earmarked for campaigns on Prasar Bharati, and the Agriculture Ministry has informed that it is more than halving its spend on Prasar Bharati.

State-run Prasar Bharati has long struggled to compete with private broadcasters. It now emerges that even the government has begun to cut-or withdraw altogether-funds allocated for publicity on Prasar Bharati.

The Health Ministry has withdrawn Rs 100 crore it had earmarked for campaigns on Prasar Bharati, and the Agriculture Ministry has informed the Information & Broadcasting Ministry that it is more than halving its spend on Prasar Bharati, from Rs 145 crore to Rs 70 crore.

READ: [Prasar CEO Jawhar Sircar hits back: Why can't Ministry send Review results to us?](#)

These, and similar revelations are part of a detailed analysis of Prasar Bharati's performance carried out by the I&B Ministry recently. I&B Minister [Arun Jaitley](#) and his deputy Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore have already gone through the analysis and given their comments. The Ministry is now in the process of submitting the analysis to the Prime Minister's Office.

Some departments like the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation in the Ministry of Agriculture have also raised questions about the relevance of programmes such as Krishi Darshan on Doordarshan, and asked that they be made more meaningful, top sources in the I&B Ministry told [The Indian Express](#).

“This [the slashing of budgets] signals the loss of trust, confidence and credibility in entrusting funds to Prasar Bharati, considering the declining level of viewership of such programmes,” says the report analysing the performance of the public broadcaster, the sources said.

The report shows that DD National ranks No. 13 in the Broadcast Audience Research Council’s (BARC) list of top 15 general entertainment channels, and No. 9 in a list of 14 drawn up by TAM Media Research.

DD News is 8th out of 14 news channels as per BARC, and 10th out of 18 as per TAM; DD Sports is 10th out of 13 sports channels on BARC’s list. Eighteen other DD channels have fared just as badly.

Minister Rathore conceded there was a “weakness” in Prasar Bharati, and said it must carry out a “self-analysis”.

In response to a questionnaire seeking comments on the I&B Ministry’s analysis of Prasar Bharati’s performance, its Chief Executive Officer Jawhar Sircar said, “Prasar Bharati is not a PSU or a Company that has to keep Balance Sheets on Profits and Losses and Gaps. It is a Statutory Autonomous Body that has a definite mandate to cover specific (terribly non-profitable) areas that no private broadcaster does”.

Sircar said the budget cut by the Health Ministry “is for several reasons that DD would be able to detail during working hours, but one version is that it was egged on by a Vibhishana to spite this organisation. Can’t say for sure”.

He said the “Agriculture Ministry has some issues and our Chairman had fruitful discussions with the Minister: so why pick on such homely issues in public unless the ‘unnamed officials’ want to discredit their own organisation.

Who gives these gentlemen the right to decide ‘loss of trust’ etc based on one example?”

Prasar Bharati’s viewership and revenue data are in inverse proportion to the expenditure incurred by it, shows the Ministry’s assessment.

“From Rs 1,608 crore in 2012-13, Prasar Bharati’s expenditure rose to Rs 1,850 crore in 2014-15 — an increase of nearly 15 per cent. But their revenues in the corresponding period declined from Rs 1,137 crore to Rs 993 crore — a drop of nearly 13 per cent,” a source said.

The Ministry has underlined that the revenues of Doordarshan Kendras constitute a minuscule percentage of their expenditure, and that the situation has been worsening rapidly. “There is a yawning gap between expenditure and revenue to the extent of Rs 857 crore in 2014-15 against a gap of Rs 470 crore in 2012-13,” it has said.

The report has pointed out that while the “Government of India is committed to pay the salaries of the staff and employees to Prasar Bharati till 2017” in line with the recommendations of a Group of Ministers in September 2012, “this is with the presumption that Prasar Bharati will suo motu make efforts to generate revenues and be self-sustaining, which appears to be a distant dream”.

It has wondered if the Prasar Bharati Board has ever considered this data in its meetings, or evaluated the reasons for its dismal performance. “This is indeed an alarm bell regarding the future of Prasar Bharati and it is becoming a drain on the Government exchequer which is likely to be recurring over the next few years,” the report has warned.

According to the Ministry, the “low level of performance”, “high level of expenditure” and “poor visibility” of all DD channels underline the need for “drastic measures... besides fixing responsibility and accountability at Prasar Bharati...”.

Top sources said that the assessment, at one point, has compared Prasar Bharati to a “white elephant”, and advised that “some stringent measures need to be taken to

clear the mess that is emerging before it becomes an endemic disease difficult to contain”.

It has recommended that a detailed analysis be presented to the Secretary (Expenditure) and the PMO “so that we could seek their advice also on undertaking measures to check the downfall of Prasar Bharati as an institution”.

Reached for a reaction, Rathore said, “The data about Doordarshan’s viewership is mainly about urban areas and does not include a large number of rural areas where Doordarshan has high viewership. But even then, Prasar Bharati, undoubtedly, must conduct a self-analysis and it must come up with various models to increase its viewability as well as revenue generation.

Rathore conceded that “content generation” continued to be a “weakness”, and said the government had “asked Prasar Bharati to do an analysis on their own to come up with ways to eliminate weaknesses”.

“As one of the measures to improve content generation, Prasar Bharati is actively considering outsourcing slots to professional content creators who will provide content for Doordarshan to air with a built-in revenue sharing mechanism,” the Minister said.

According to Rathore, Prasar Bharati’s “expenditures were high” given its public service role and manpower. But, he conceded, “man-management issues are there”, and “we have to look for efficiency that comes within the system and within its mandate”.