

Prasar Bharati relaxes Doordarshan prime-time slot auction norms

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Prasar Bharati has also removed the restrictions on programming languages, thus widening the pool of eligible applicants. Photo: Ramesh Pathania/Mint

New Delhi: Film production companies will now be allowed to bid for prime-time programming slots on Doordarshan (DD) along with television content producers. This comes as part of the changes made in the slot sale policy by public broadcaster Prasar Bharati.

Doordarshan had to cancel a planned auction for prime-time programming slots on 14 July as some potential bidders failed to meet the eligibility criteria. However, in its board meeting earlier this week, Prasar Bharati asked Doordarshan to restart the auction process and issue a fresh set of applications inviting the production houses to bid.

In further relaxation of norms, Prasar Bharati has removed the restrictions on programming languages, thus widening the pool of eligible applicants. Earlier, only the production houses with an experience in Hindi general entertainment programming were entitled to bid in the auction.

"We have taken into consideration many of the suggestions that were earlier given by production houses. A lot of concessions have been

made to attract more producers to participate in the auction," said Jawhar Sircar, chief executive officer at Prasar Bharati which runs Doordarshan and All India Radio.

According to the revised policy, a production house will now be eligible to bid if it has logged a revenue of at least `3 crore per annum (reduced from `5 crore per annum) in each of the past three financial years and has produced at least 200 hours (reduced from 300 hours) of general entertainment programming including feature films in the last three calendar years among other conditions.

Clearly, the changes will allow many more production companies to make a bid for the slots on DD National. Among the film production firms that evinced an interest in working with Doordarshan is Trinity Pictures, the franchise division of the film studio Eros International. Speaking to *Mint* earlier, Ajit Thakur, chief executive officer, Trinity Pictures said that if his company has to get into production of television content, it would prefer it to be for the public broadcaster because of its sheer reach.

In the earlier auction process, Doordarshan had received applications from large production houses like Ekta Kapoor promoted Balaji Telefilms, Optymistix Entertainment Pvt. Ltd, which runs *Comedy Nights Live* on Colors, Contiloe Entertainment Pvt. Ltd and Cinevistaas.

Some of these had failed to submit the `5,000 document fee, while yet others did not submit a declaration that they had not been DD defaulters in the past due to which their applications were rejected.

"Most of these conditions (on which applicants were rejected) were procedural and not material. The board admitted that the policy kept no scope of common sense," Sircar said. In its new policy, the broadcaster has altogether removed the conditions for the production houses to submit documentary proof which was earlier required to establish eligibility.

Prasar Bharati in its 16 May board meeting had decided to put up 7-11pm slots on all weekdays on auction, while keeping the 7-8pm slot on Saturdays for its own content. Up until now, the broadcaster used to purchase programmes from production houses under the self-finance commissioning scheme (SFC) and generated advertising revenues. The producers who had provided programmes to Doordarshan under the SFC scheme moved the Delhi high court in May, complaining that the slot-sale policy was discriminatory and violated the rights of small individual producers.

"Keeping the judicial challenges in mind and being a public body, we have been careful while framing the revised policy," Sircar said.