

MAPPING DIGITAL MEDIA: INDIA



Mapping Digital Media: India

A REPORT BY THE OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS

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2. Digital Media and Public or State-administered Broadcasters

2.1 Public Service and State Institutions

2.1.1 Overview of Public Service Media; News and Current Affairs Output

India's public service broadcaster Prasar Bharati was established in 1997 as a statutory autonomous body to oversee All India Radio (Akashvani, AIR) and National Television (Doordarshan, DD).⁶¹ Today it comprises a network of 31 television channels and 232 radio stations, and is among the largest terrestrial networks in the world.⁶²

However, editorial independence has always been in debate, and media observers often cite examples of how DD and AIR news favors the position of the incumbent government. Paranjay Guha Thakurta, an experienced print journalist who also hosts a program on Lok Sabha TV, says Prasar Bharati has become poorly managed, mediocre, highly bureaucratic, and remains a de facto propaganda division of the ruling party. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) thus indirectly controls its day-to-day functioning (especially news broadcasts). It is, he says, appalling that India remains one of the few democracies where radio news is tightly controlled by a state-sponsored organization.⁶³ This is also evident from the administrative structure that controls and manages decisions taken by Prasar Bharati.

Its current 13-member board is responsible for the supervision and management of its affairs, as mandated by the Prasar Bharati Act, 1990. The chairman and most members are appointed by the President of India, on the recommendation of a committee comprising the chairman of the Council of States, the chairman of the PCI, and one nominee of the President. In principle, the board's autonomy is guaranteed, by having only one MIB representative on it; however, since the broadcaster depends on the government for at least

61. The Prasar Bharati Act of 1990 was finally passed in 1997 to grant autonomy to public broadcasting.

62. Radio broadcasting came to India in the 1920s, and AIR was established in 1936. The first television studio was set up in Delhi in 1959 under AIR, and was funded by UNESCO to telecast educational programs. It was only in 1976 that an independent directorate of DD became functional.

63. Interview with Paranjay Guha Thakurta, independent journalist and author, 10 May 2011.

half its budget, this makes it vulnerable to political interference in management and editorial matters. Of the board members, three are representatives of the government, i.e. Director General (AIR), Director General (Doordarshan), and an official of MIB; several other members, including the board's chairman, are appointed by a three-member committee, which includes the President's nominee and the Vice-president.⁶⁴

DD broadcasts in the terrestrial mode, mostly analog, and has a three-tier programming service: national channels—DD National,⁶⁵ DD News,⁶⁶ DD Sports,⁶⁷ DD Bharati,⁶⁸ DD Gyandarshan,⁶⁹ DD Urdu⁷⁰—regional channels⁷¹ (11 regional language satellite channels⁷² and 12 state networks⁷³), and an international channel, DD India.⁷⁴ All the channels are also available on cable and satellite. DD was the first to offer a DTH service, in 2004; DD Direct Plus, a rent-free service, has 58 private television and radio channels, 21 DD channels, and 21 AIR channels.

In the national terrestrial mode, DD transmits DD National and DD News through its 1,416 transmitters. DD National covers about 92 percent of the population and 82 percent of the country's territory, and has the largest potential reach among all Indian channels. DD News covers about half the population and 25.6 percent of the country's area.

DD News content is produced by the News Center in Delhi, supported by 24 Regional News Units (RNUs), and telecast through 87 daily bulletins in 19 languages. About 60 percent of content is entertainment-oriented. News and current affairs constitute 8 percent of airtime on DD National, about 18 percent on DD India, 8 percent on DD Urdu, and 12.5 percent on DD Regional (terrestrial).⁷⁵ While no news is broadcast on DD Bharati, generally the number of bulletins on regional satellite channels varies.⁷⁶

64. See <http://prasarbharati.gov.in/Corporate/pb+act> (accessed 9 December 2012).

65. DD National (also called DDI) is the flagship channel on which national, regional, and local programs are broadcast on a time-sharing basis; it is available in both terrestrial and satellite modes.

66. DD News was started in November 2003 and is the only 24-hour bilingual terrestrial news channel.

67. Launched in March 1999, this dedicated sports channel covers national and international sporting events.

68. DD Bharati is a 24-hour infotainment channel started in January 2002.

69. Gyandarshan is a 24-hour educational channel launched in 2000 as a collaboration between the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Prasar Bharati, and the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU).

70. The channel was launched in 2006 to cater to the Urdu-speaking population.

71. The regional language satellite services and regional state networks broadcast a wide range of programs in regional languages, produced largely in the 66 DD studio centers across the country.

72. These include DD Malayalam, DD Podhigai (Tamil), DD Saptagiri (Telugu), DD Chandana (Kannada), DD Sahyadri (Marathi), DD Girnar (Gujarati), DD Kashir (Kashmiri), DD North East, and DD Punjabi.

73. The networks are available in the states of Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh Jharkhand, Chhatisgarh, Haryana, Uttaranchal, Tripura, Mizoram, Meghalaya.

74. DD India is a 24-hour international channel for Indians living abroad launched in 1995.

75. Prasar Bharati (2008), "Annual Report (2007–08)," Government of India, New Delhi.

76. For example, the 24-hour channel DD Bangla (Bengali language service) has 15 news bulletins of 10 minutes each; interview with Ashok Jaikhan, Additional Director General (Programme), Doordarshan, New Delhi, 15 April 2011.

AIR is among the world's largest radio networks. Terrestrially, its geographic reach covers 99.18 percent of the population with 232 radio stations. Twenty-one AIR channels are also available on DD Direct Plus. The AIR offering includes the national channel,⁷⁷ primary channels,⁷⁸ local radio stations,⁷⁹ Vividh Bharati,⁸⁰ Rainbow,⁸¹ and Gold,⁸² external services broadcast,⁸³ and other niche channels⁸⁴ covering 24 languages and 146 dialects in home services and 27 languages (17 national and 10 foreign) in its external services. AIR FM channels, which cover about 31 percent of the urban population, face competition from 245 private FM channels (allowed phased operations since 2000).

AIR's News Services Division (NSD) and its RNUs together produce current daily news broadcasts totaling 54 hours and 32 minutes in 89 regional languages and dialects, including Hindi and English.⁸⁵ On the AIR primary channels, news and current affairs programs constitute about 24 percent of the content; on local radio stations the news content is about 17.1 percent and entertainment 50.1 percent.

Prasar Bharati is largely dependent on government funding according to Article 17 of the Prasar Bharati Act 1990.⁸⁶ Its budget is allocated by the Planning Commission of India⁸⁷ and comes via the MIB in the form of equity, grant-in-aid, or loans.⁸⁸ Special budgetary allocations are also made, for instance in the case of the Commonwealth Games as well as for digitization.⁸⁹

77. Launched in 1988 as a night service, the national channel covers about 76 percent of the population with content in Hindi, Urdu, and English.

78. The primary channels are available mostly on the MW frequency and are the most accessible AIR channels across regions; they broadcast mainly "infotainment" content.

79. Local radio is a relatively new broadcasting concept in India, where each station serves a small community.

80. This commercial channel of AIR began in October 1957 and has mostly film music-based programs.

81. FM Rainbow started in 1995 for urban areas and broadcasts English and Hindi music, chat shows, and phone-ins.

82. FM Gold, born in 2001, operates from Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai. It offers classical and film music.

83. The external service was started in 1939 for the Indian diaspora and now reaches 100 countries.

84. This includes the classical music channel, Amrutha Varshini.

85. Prasar Bharati (2009), "Annual Report (2008–09)," Government of India, New Delhi.

86. The Act states that "the Central Government may, after due appropriation made by Parliament by law in this behalf, pay to the Corporation in each financial year

(i) the proceeds of the broadcast receiver license fees, if any, as reduced by the collection charges; and

(ii) such other sums of money as the Government considers necessary,

by way of equity, grant-in-aid or loan."

87. The Planning Commission makes five-year plans for all sectors; the 11th Plan ran from 2007 to 2012.

88. Equity consists of investment in public enterprises; grant-in-aid comprises plan and non-plan funds that do not have to be paid back. The non-plan outlay allocated to Prasar Bharati is used for meeting operating expenses and augmentation, replacement and maintenance of capital assets of AIR and DD, along with shortfalls in salaries.

89. For instance, Rs9.34 billion (US\$ 167 million) was set aside for AIR and Rs6.2 billion (US\$ 111 million) for DD for digitization under the 11th Plan scheme; and Rs4.15 billion (US\$74 million) sanctioned for the coverage of the 2010 Commonwealth Games, equally divided as a grant and a loan.

Table 18.

Financial status of Prasar Bharati (Rs million), 2006–2010

	2006–2007	2007–2008	2008–2009	2009–2010
Income	9,830.5	10,358.6	10,967.8	11,190.0
Expenditure	19,546.7	20,579.2	25,188.8	30,980.0
Deficit	9,716.2	10,220.6	14,221.0	19,790.0

Source: Lok Sabha, starred Question No. 166, answered 9 March 2010

Prasar Bharati has reaped revenues from commercial programming and enjoys certain competitive advantages over private broadcasters, such as through the Sports Broadcasting Signal Act of 2007, which allows DD and AIR to share telecasts of major sports events hosted by private channels and including at least 25 percent advertising revenue share in television and 50 percent in radio.⁹⁰

A Group of Ministers (GoM) report from April 2010 on the financial restructuring of Prasar Bharati recommended converting outstanding government loans to grants, waiving interest, and scaling down support. It called for Plan funding to be given only in the form of grants, and a cap on the government's annual financial support at 50 percent of its operating expenses for the next five years. The committee rejected a license fee proposal, arguing it would be difficult and costly to administer.⁹¹ In the light of objections, the committee later recommended that the government should meet employees' salaries and expenses related to pay, while other expenses should come from internal revenue.⁹² Prasar Bharati subsequently revised its funding plans, including an active marketing strategy,⁹³ e-auctions of channel slots on its DTH services (see section 2.1.2) and prime-time slots on DD National to production houses, cross-channel advertising from private broadcasters,⁹⁴ and the launch of over 200 AIR FM stations to tap local advertisers.⁹⁵

Questions have often been raised in parliament about the declining popularity of DD channels. Trends in digital take-up in Table 3 signal a visible decline in terrestrial-only households; this is explained by both the migration of existing households to C&S, and the propensity of fresh television households, especially in scattered rural areas, to “leapfrog” to DTH services, including those from private vendors.⁹⁶

90. Since 2007, Doordarshan has also had sole broadcasting rights for major sporting events including the 2007 World Military Games, the 2008 Olympics Games in Beijing, and the 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi.

91. According to Mr Jaikhani, Prasar Bharati has at various times proposed a license fee, but the government is resistant to implementing this, as it might affect its mass political support.

92. “GoM for govt meeting salary of Prasar Bharati employees,” at http://articles.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/2011-08-16/news/29892257_1_prasar-bharati-goms-public-broadcaster (accessed 2 January 2012).

93. Marketing divisions have been established in nine cities to sell commercial time. While DD hopes to garner revenues by airing popular films and commissioning professional production houses for prime-time programs, AIR has plans for more interactive programs, local variation, and dedicated time slots for target audiences.

94. Prasar Bharati had until then barred the airing of commercials from private media firms, including those of DTH operators.

95. In 2011, Prasar Bharati approved the expansion of AIR's FM stations to 313 cities under an MIB scheme.

96. Thinly scattered populations make it near impossible, and hardly lucrative, to extend cable relays; FICCI-KPMG, 2012, p. 15.

But DD has always maintained that its in-house Audience Ratings System⁹⁷ gives a different picture of audiences, and that TAM's urban-centric sample does not adequately capture the public broadcaster's viewership. MIB has maintained, using both DART and TAM data, that most viewers still prefer DD. In March 2010, the Minister said that out of the top 20 programs across terrestrial and C&S channels, 11 were from DD National. Also, the TVR of DD News outstripped all others except Aaj Tak and Star News. In late 2011, referring to the latest TAM report, the Minister again stressed⁹⁸ that DD ranked second in overall viewership and that according to a DART week-long survey it ranked first when the comparative ratings of DD and private channels were considered.⁹⁹

Table 19.

TAM rating of DD News and some private C&S news channels, 2006, 2008, and 2010

Channel	TVR 2006	TVR 2008	TVR 2010
DD News	0.13	0.07	0.04
Aaj Tak	0.06	0.07	0.07
Star News	0.05	0.06	0.05
Zee News	0.04	0.04	0.04
NDTV India	0.04	0.03	0.03
NDTV 24x7	0.01	0.01	0.01
CNN-IBN	0.01	0.01	0.01

Sources: Reply to Parliament Question No. 1168 in Lok Sabha (2008 data until November) and Parliament Question No. 1887 in Rajya Sabha (2010 data until February)

TAM calculates Television Ratings Points (TRPs) via Peplemeters installed in sample homes. The average for a 30-day period gives the viewership data per channel. DART uses a system whereby selected viewers note down programs they watched, with these diaries collected weekly to analyze viewership data. One can, however, argue that despite the controversies about the methodologies, urban television audiences turn to private news channels for two reasons: because DD is perceived to air government viewpoints, especially during critical events such as elections and conflict scenarios; and because C&S channels provide continuous updates and unscheduled, special bulletins as compared with DD, which although also broadcasting live, does not tend to tamper with its regular news cycles.

97. The DART (Doordarshan Audience Ratings) system is based on data collected by 40 DD and 100 AIR stations from 3,600 rural and 1,600 urban households.

98. Rajya Sabha, Question No. 1168, answered 7 March 2011.

99. "DD India's most watched TV channel," at <http://www.hindustantimes.com/News-Feed/SectorsInfotech/DD-Indias-most-watched-TV-channel/Article1-731835.aspx> (accessed 26 December 2011).

2.1.2 Digitization and Services

Since 2002, the public broadcaster has started direct-to-home (DTH), high definition television (HDTV), and mobile broadcasting services, and it has also introduced news websites and SMS-based news content. The satellite transmission of all DD channels is digital. Digitization of production centers was part of the 10th Plan outlay, and of the total 66 Doordarshan Kendras (Doordarshan Centers) 21 have been made fully digital, including the Central News Division in Delhi. The current (11th) Plan lays emphasis on digital terrestrial television (DTT) and DTH services, and no further expansion of DD's terrestrial network.¹⁰⁰

DTT started in January 2003, when DVB-T transmitters were installed in New Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, and Chennai. The process is due to be completed by 2017. For the first phase ending in 2013, DD is to digitize 40 transmitters for which procurement of DVB-T2 transmitters is under way.¹⁰¹ However, all throughout the process until 2017 terrestrial transmission will be in simulcast mode.¹⁰²

DD launched its DTH service DD Direct Plus in September 2004 with 33 television channels, now increased to 58.¹⁰³ DD Direct Plus does not charge subscribers; it raises revenues through carriage fees charged from private broadcasters. It therefore has a bigger market in smaller towns and rural areas, and it is a cheaper distribution platform for the private broadcasters. Ashok Jaikhani, Additional Director General of DD, states, "DD Direct Plus is popular in smaller towns and remote areas such as Ladakh and the North East, where people cannot afford (private) pay channels. A conservative estimate says that DD Direct is number two in the DTH market."¹⁰⁴ As such, there is no system of quantifying DD Direct Plus receivers/viewers, since its signals are unencrypted, and it has no branded STBs;¹⁰⁵ any STB based on open DVB standards can receive and be used for free-to-air channels offered by other DTH platforms. DTH has expanded the broadcaster's services by offering a diverse range of public and private channels. DD Direct Plus provides all language channels, nationwide.

When DD Direct Plus was launched, no specifics were set out for including private broadcasters. However, these were included "in order to reach out to a wider audience and make the service popular."¹⁰⁶ Selection was made on "factors such as genre of the channel, its popularity and conformity with the Prasar Bharati mandate, as well as to maintain regional balance covering different languages to make the bouquet attractive and wholesome."¹⁰⁷

100. Planning Commission of India, "11th Five-Year Plan (2007–12)," Government of India, New Delhi, p. 448.

101. Interview with Archana Gupta, Director (Engineering) of Transmitter Design, Doordarshan, New Delhi, 22 April 2012. See also "DVB-T2 Tender in India," at http://www.dvb.org/news_events/news/dvb-t2-tender-in-india/index.xml (accessed 28 December 2012).

102. While TRAI recommended that 31 December 2013 should be the sunset date for analog transmission, the government stated that digitization of both DD and AIR can only be completed by 2017.

103. At present, DD Direct Plus has 58 TV channels (36 private and 22 DD) and 24 AIR stations.

104. Interview with Ashok Jaikhani, Additional Director General (Programme), Doordarshan, New Delhi, 15 April 2011.

105. TRAI, "Consultation Paper on Issues relating to DTH," Government of India, 2 March 2007, at <http://www.trai.gov.in/trai/upload/ConsultationPapers/110/cpaperDTH.pdf> (accessed 10 April 2011).

106. Rajya Sabha, Question No. 2740, answered 22 August 2005.

107. Lok Sabha, unstarred Question No. 22, answered 23 February 2010.

With the growing presence of DD's DTH service,¹⁰⁸ by 2005 about 80 Indian and foreign channels were set to join the platform. So in 2006 the government permitted Prasar Bharati to raise the number of television channels in its DTH line-up from 33 to 50.¹⁰⁹ The proposed annual carriage fee of Rs10 million (US\$ 181,000)¹¹⁰ from existing and new broadcasters¹¹¹ led to almost all news and entertainment channels quitting the platform,¹¹² so in 2007 the carriage fee was reduced to Rs2.5 million (US\$ 44,000).¹¹³

In June 2011, Prasar Bharati decided to expand the DTH platform to 200 channels via e-auctions¹¹⁴—after legal battles with private broadcasters, following which the Telecom Disputes Settlement Tribunal (TDSAT) directed it to adopt a transparent allocation system.¹¹⁵ It fixed the minimum reserve price of Rs15 million (US\$ 262,000) per channel slot.¹¹⁶ In e-auctions in July and August, 26 slots were sold to private broadcasters for Rs 763 million (US\$13.4 million)—over three times the price fixed in June.¹¹⁷

However, the 100 channel target has not been met, due to lack of transponders on satellites—despite Prasar Bharati having initiated steps for efficient spectrum management by moving to MPEG-4 compression technology, which translates into more channels per satellite transponder, and using a new GSAT 8 satellite with 24 Ku band transponders.¹¹⁸ It now has 36 private channels, each of which paid Rs20–30 million (US\$ 350,000–525,000) for one year. More e-auctions were planned for 2012; while full details about these auctions, including the outcomes, are not known, the channel slot auction revenue is expected to meet nearly a third of budget allocations for DD.¹¹⁹

To augment the capacity of its DTH platform from 59 to 200, on 13 May 2011 the board also cleared a proposal to outsource its operational and technical management to private DTH operators.¹²⁰ But this drew

108. According to industry estimates, DD Direct Plus had almost 1 million subscribers in 2005.

109. Rajya Sabha, Question No. 275, answered 12 December 2005.

110. 1 US\$ = Rs55.24.

111. "DD DTH to charge fee from pvt broadcasters," at http://articles.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/2006-04-05/news/27449447_1_dd-channels-tv-channels-dd-dth (accessed 10 December 2011).

112. Except MH1, Smile TV, and Kairali TV.

113. Foreign broadcasters, however, had to pay a carriage fee of Rs5 million (US\$ 87,500): see <http://www.saveondish.com/forum/T-doorarshan-targets-100-channels-on-dth-platform> (accessed 1 December 2011).

114. "Prasar Bharati board gives nod to DTH expansion," at <http://www.indiantelevision.com/headlines/y2k11/june/june54.php> (accessed 10 December 2011).

115. An auction was also seen as a chance to make the broadcaster financially independent and use additional resources to meet operational costs, create more content, and expand its reach via DTH services.

116. Ashish Sinha, "PSUs line up to hold DD's DTH e-auction," at <http://www.financialexpress.com/news/PSUs-line-up-to-hold-DD-s-DTH-e-auction/816558> (accessed 5 January 2012).

117. "Doordarshan Reaps Rs 763 Million from DD Direct Plus DTH Auction," at <http://www.rapidtvnews.com/index.php/rtvn-india/news/doordarshan-reaps-inr763mn-from-dth-slot-auction.html> (accessed 24 December 2011).

118. "DD's DTH arm slot auction set to fetch R400 cr," at <http://www.financialexpress.com/news/dds-dth-arm-slot-auction-set-to-fetch-r400-cr/796908> (accessed 24 December 2011).

119. "Doordarshan to e-auction slots in DTH arm from today," at <http://www.dddirectplus.info/2011/07/doordarshan-to-e-auction-slots-in-dth-arm-from-today> (accessed 26 December 2011).

120. Under the proposed arrangement, private operators will manage the entire technical back-end of DD Direct Plus, including uplink and downlink of channels, quality control, expansion, and subscriber management.

protests from DD and AIR employee unions,¹²¹ who argue that it would incur losses and violates a Union Cabinet decision on the DTH expansion plan,¹²² so the government has yet to clear it.¹²³

Table 20.

Private channels on DD Direct Plus, 2004, 2007, 2010, and 2011

September 2004	May 2007	May 2010	December 2011
Aaj Tak	9XM	9X	9X
Aakash Bangla	Aastha TV	9XM	9XM
BBC World	Amrita TV	AasthaTV	Aalami Sahara
ETC Punjabi	B4U Music	Amrita TV	Aastha TV
ETV Marathi	Bhakti Mosaic	Azad News	B4U Movies
Headlines Today	Care world TV	B4U Music	B4U Music
Jain TV	Chardikla TIME TV	Care World TV	B4U Music
Kairali TV	DW-TV ASIA	Chardikla TIME TV	Channel Divya
MH1	E 24	DW-TV	Chardikla TIME TV
STAR Utsav	Enterr10	E 24	Day & Night News
Sun TV	ETC India	Enterr10	DW-TV ASIA
TV9	India TV	ETC	Enterr10
Zee Music	Jaihind TV	ETC Punjabi	ETC
Zee Smile	Kairali TV	IBN Lokmat	Kairali TV
	Kalaighnar TV	India TV	Katyayani TV
	KBS World	Jaihind TV	Mega TV
	Makkal TV	Kairali TV	MH1 Music
	MEGA TV	Kalangan TV	MH1 Shraddha
	MH1 Shraddha	Makkal TV	News Express
	Music India	MEGA TV	NHK WORLD TV
	News Live	MH1	P7 News
	News24	MH1 Shraddha	PTC News
	NHK WORLD TV	Music India	Russia Today
	PTC News	News Live	Sadhna TV
	Shakti TV	News24	Sahara Firangi
	STAR Utsav	NHK WORLD TV	Sahara Samay

121. The employee unions are the Association of Radio and Television Engineering Employees (ARTEE) and the National Federation of Akashvani and Doordarshan Employees (NFADE).

122. In August 2010, the government approved the DTH expansion plan for DD Direct Plus by increasing the number of channels offered from 59 to 97; Yatish Yadav, "Scam hits Doordarshan's direct-to-home service expansion plan," at <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/dth-scam-prasar-bharati-ceo-doordarshan/1/158998.html> (accessed 12 December 2011).

123. "DD DTH scam out, No 200 channel due to transponder shortage," at <http://sattvupdate.blogspot.com/2011/12/dd-dth-scam-out-no-200-channel-due-to.html> (accessed 14 December 2011).

Table 20. (continued)

Private channels on DD Direct Plus, 2004, 2007, 2010, and 2011

September 2004	May 2007	May 2010	December 2011
	Zee Jagran	PBC TV	Sanskar TV
	Zee Smile	PTC news	Shakti TV
		Shakti TV	Star Utsav
		Star Jalsa	SVBC TV
		SVBC	Test 410
		Total TV	TV 24
		Zee Jagran	What's On India
		Zee Smile	Zee Jagran
			Zee Salaam
			Zee Smile

Sources: Various, and see <http://www.dddirectplus.info/channels-list/> (accessed 28 December 2012)

As with DTH, Prasar Bharati was also the first provider of mobile television services, which started in New Delhi in May 2007 with eight DD channels. It has now grown to 16 channels (including DD News), which are received free of cost.¹²⁴ The pilot was carried out in collaboration with Nokia, so transmission was only available on Nokia high-end mobiles; now any DVB-H enabled phone can get free access to television channels via any service provider. DD has no approved scheme to start mobile television elsewhere, mainly due to the costs.¹²⁵

In April 2010, TRAI recommended opening the mobile television sector to private players (MIB has yet to act),¹²⁶ calling for sharing terrestrial transmission infrastructure among DD, private players, and television operators for better spectrum utilization. Broadcasters reject many clauses and want the terrestrial spectrum opened to private players since it is cheaper than using telecom spectrum. Pulak Bagchi of Star India says, “In a country where the average mobile user has a prepaid connection ... paid mobile television is unlikely to work. Private players are therefore not keen on it.”¹²⁷

Prasar Bharati was appointed broadcasting host of the 2010 Commonwealth Games in New Delhi, giving it exclusive telecast rights for television/radio coverage within India.¹²⁸ All events were covered in HDTV.¹²⁹ Since then, DD HDTV runs as a channel on DD Direct Plus with 4–6 hours of content that comprises capsules of Commonwealth Games events (no specific content has been planned). DD plans HDTV studios

124. These include DD National, DD Bangla, DD Chandana, DD Oriya, DD News, DD Urdu, DD Gujarati, DD Sahyadri, DD Sports, DD Punjabi, DD Malayalam, DD Sapngiri, DD Bharati, DD India, DD Podhigai.

125. Interview with R.R. Prasad, Ex-Chief Engineer, Doordarshan, New Delhi, 5 April 2011.

126. TRAI submitted its final recommendations to the government on 14 April 2010, accepting most of the government views on a previously circulated draft.

127. Interview with Pulak Bagchi, VP, Legal and Regulatory Affairs, Star India, New Delhi, 22 April 2011.

128. No public consultation preceded the decision to grant hosting rights to the public broadcaster.

129. Prasar Bharati could not manage such an event in HDTV and thus partnered with international companies.

in New Delhi and Mumbai, and terrestrial transmitters, production, and post-production facilities in India's four largest cities, to be fully operational in the 12th Plan period. Prasar Bharati introduced the website Ddnews.gov.in in July 2001 to provide news in English and Hindi. In 2006, Doordarshan also launched an SMS-based news service, providing the top four news headlines and cricket score updates on days of live match telecasts on DD Sports.

Digitization of production, transmission, and uplinking facilities has been undertaken at over 70 AIR stations under the 11th Plan. Digitization of news gathering, production, and broadcast has been introduced at the NSD in New Delhi and at RNUs.¹³⁰ Plans are under way to introduce Digital Radio Mondiale (DRM) transmission below the 30 MHz MF and HF bands by upgrading or replacing old transmitters.¹³¹ All digital transmission will be in simulcast mode for about 10 years.¹³²

The websites Newsonair.com and Newsonair.nic.in, launched in late 2007, carry daily and weekly news bulletins and news-based AIR programs. One can access 40 regional bulletins from 22 RNUs in 14 regional languages and 32 language bulletins in 13 languages.

2.1.3 Government Support

Since 2002, digitization has become a priority for the government. While there is no separate legislation passed to this effect, the Planning Commission's 11th Plan document¹³³ states:

Digitization of satellite transmission, production centers/studios, and terrestrial transmission needs to be undertaken in a mission mode along with introduction of HDTV, IPTV, mobile television, and other value-added services. For the entire broadcasting sector "Going Digital" and "Farming out Excess Bandwidth" need to be taken up expeditiously to ensure switching over to digital transmission by 2015 and optimal use of scarce bandwidth.¹³⁴

In 2006, the Planning Commission's Sub-Committee on Digitization of Electronic Media recommended phased digitization for the public broadcaster and private companies. It stated: "Digital technology is spectrum efficient and has been a factor to promote digital revolution. Digital Terrestrial TV ... needs to be promoted and incentivized in the light of its obvious potential and advantages."¹³⁵

130. Many program archives of AIR, such as classic music recordings, have also been brought out as DVDs.

131. AIR conducted trial transmissions of the DRM service on short wave in January 2007 and launched it in January 2009.

132. Sujit Chakraborty, "AIR's Digitization to stretch beyond 2015," at <http://www.indiantelevision.com/headlines/y2k7/feb/feb130.htm> (accessed 5 April, 2011).

133. Planning Commission of India, "11th Five Year Plan (2007–11)," Government of India, New Delhi, p. 449.

134. In April 2010, the government approved Rs15.4 billion (US\$ 270 million) for the first phase of digitization. Earlier in 2008, it lent Rs3.26 billion (US\$57 million) to Prasar Bharati toward setting up an International Broadcasting Center and other facilities as a host broadcaster for the Commonwealth Games 2010. See Planning Commission (2006), *Report of the Sub-Group on Going Digital under the Chairmanship of Member Secretary Planning Commission*, Planning Commission, Government of India, New Delhi, October, p.19, at http://planningcommission.nic.in/plans/planrel/goingdig/drft_gdig.pdf (accessed 13 December 2012).

135. Planning Commission (2006), *Report of the Sub-Group on Going Digital under the Chairmanship of Member Secretary Planning Commission*, Planning Commission, Government of India, New Delhi, October, p. 19, at http://planningcommission.nic.in/plans/planrel/goingdig/drft_gdig.pdf (accessed 13 December 2012). (Hereafter, *Going Digital*.)

Political support for the public broadcaster's digitization plans extends to privileged allocation of spectrum, for example, that is given to high-priority areas such as defense and space exploration.¹³⁶ Competitive advantages also exist for its DTH service. Although proposed back in 1996, DTH satellite broadcasting was not approved for private broadcasters due to national security concerns, and in 1999 the government decided to give the first DTH license to DD.¹³⁷ Under the 11th Plan scheme, Rs 754 million (US\$13.2 million) has been approved for upgrading its capacity from 59 to 97 television channels. Free DTH receivers will be given to people in border, remote, and tribal areas.

Digitization has helped to expand the broadcaster's reach, but it has not necessarily affected output diversity. While DTH carries regional channels nationwide, the choice of channels offered on this and the mobile platform is the same as on C&S. Owing to advertising and ratings pressures, the content is similar to that of private broadcasters. According to Mr Jailkhani,¹³⁸ "a few years back DD had commissioned serials based on classic texts from notable Indian film directors. But those serials did not produce audience ratings and were taken off prime time, only to be replaced by the staple fare of soaps."

Dr H.O. Srivastava, retired Engineer-in-Chief, Doordarshan, points out: "Although the PSB fulfills certain universal service obligations by having educational and development content in diverse languages, altogether it is short of quality content [...] Further, digital opportunities are yet to be used for niche or local TV channels or for development of exclusive web-based content."¹³⁹

2.1.4 Public Service Media and Digital Switch-over

Digitization of DTT platforms is still at the pilot stage. The first was installed in 1984 at AIR's New Delhi headquarters, with receiver sets there and with the Secretary of the MIB. Five years later, the transmitter was shut down. A digital television transmitter was installed in New Delhi in 2003, but its receiving sets have had no takers. The cost of sets and STBs for DTT remains prohibitive, though engineers in DD expect prices will be lowered by manufacturers once demand picks up.¹⁴⁰ In contrast, and quite apart from the price of STBs, investing in DD's own DTH service would enable viewers to access a higher number of channels from both DD and private broadcasters. While DTT does offer the potential for more localized channels, this has not been exploited hitherto.¹⁴¹

Plans and pilots are under way to digitize SW and MW transmissions of AIR, but a listener would currently need receivers for MW, SW, and FM.¹⁴² The government plans for a simulcast, especially for MW services,

136. Interview with Abhishek Agarwal, Deputy Director (Engineering), Doordarshan, New Delhi, 15 April 2011.

137. In 1997, the government imposed a ban when Rupert Murdoch's ISkyB was to launch its DTH service in India.

138. Interview with Ashok Jailkhani, Additional Director General (Programme), Doordarshan, New Delhi, 15 April 2011.

139. Interview with Dr H.O. Srivastava, Engineer-in-Chief (retired), Doordarshan, New Delhi, 5 April 2011.

140. "Doordarshan can only dictate the technical specifications of such receivers and not its cost," interview with Archana Gupta, Director (Engineering) of Transmitter Design, Doordarshan, New Delhi, 22 April 2012.

141. Interview with Dr H.O. Srivastava, Engineer-in-Chief (retired), Doordarshan, New Delhi, 5 April 2011.

142. An average digital receiver costs Rs 5,000–10,000 (US\$88–176).

whose radio sets are as cheap as Rs50 (US\$0.90).¹⁴³ Dr Srivastava explains: “Digitization of terrestrial network is a compulsion now as there is no longer a supply of analog transmitters ... Because the world is going digital, the switch-over is being forced on us, without consideration for the average viewer. What is required is a technology that allows convergence, so that a person can invest in one receiving set and access all terrestrial television and radio stations.”¹⁴⁴

DTT plans have yet to materialize, but the digitization process has offered ways to engage with a wider audience. Radio and television channels, including DD News, have started interactive programs, such as phone-ins and SMS contests. Digitization of AIR studios has facilitated convergence-ready content, which also supports services such as “Music on Demand.” Web/mobile initiatives are targeting urban youth. DTH also has much potential for interactivity such as Video on Demand (VOD).

2.2 Public Service Provision

2.2.1 Perception of Public Service Media

Over the last decade, the government’s own perception of the public service media as an institution is almost intriguingly inconsistent, as reflected in its attitude to some of Prasar Bharati’s services and infrastructure. Just before the first round of private FM radio stations were being licensed in 1999, an expert committee review of Prasar Bharati’s functioning proposed that AIR’s transmission, engineering, and studio capability be profitably sold to private radio operators as a means of sustaining itself.¹⁴⁵ While this did not happen, elsewhere this Report reiterated: “Public Service Broadcasting is essential in India and must be seen as a right for all citizens. Such a broadcasting platform must provide for free discourse and debate, while its content must empower the people.”¹⁴⁶ Yet the very next year a committee looking into MIB as a whole, including Prasar Bharati and numerous other paragonovernmental bodies, observed: “government controlled media as such does not also carry credibility amongst the people the world over who believe in the freedom of the media.”¹⁴⁷ It argued for discontinuing Doordarshan’s news channels at a time when a handful of Indian-owned private news channels and services were being beamed into the country from overseas, namely, “Continuous news channel does not seem to be necessary, considering that there has been considerable growth of private channels, which are already being accessed extensively through cable services.”¹⁴⁸

143. Sujit Chakraborty, “AIR’s Digitization to stretch beyond 2015,” at <http://www.indiantelevision.com/headlines/y2k7/feb/feb130.htm> (accessed 5 April 2011).

144. Interview with Dr H.O. Srivastava, Engineer-in-Chief (retired), Doordarshan, New Delhi, 5 April 2011.

145. *Report of Committee to Study the Working of the Prasar Bharati Corporation*, Government of India, 1999.

146. *Report of Committee to Study the Working of the Prasar Bharati Corporation*, Government of India, 1999.

147. Report of the Committee, “Rationalisation of the Functions, Activities and Structures of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting” (Part 3), Government of India, 2000, p. 100.

148. Report of the Committee “Rationalisation of the Functions, Activities and Structures of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting” (Part 3), Government of India, 2000, p. 126.

While this view was subsequently discounted, such an observation was intriguing, being made at around the same time that private C&S news channels were given licenses to uplink from within India.

Many supporting the principle and practice of public broadcasting call for it to be freed from government control and corruption.¹⁴⁹ B.G. Verghese, a senior journalist, notes that Prasar Bharati has never been accountable to the people, though “truly autonomous and decentralized public service broadcasting has a vital role to play in promoting dialogue and empowerment ...”¹⁵⁰ Rajiv Mehrotra, Managing Trustee of the Public Service Broadcasting Trust, argues that DD has yet to democratize itself by ensuring participation of diverse communities, and the free flow of information.¹⁵¹ Sevanti Ninan, media critic and journalist, asks: “When will some government take a firm call on whether Prasar Bharati should remain a huge liability on the exchequer, primarily engaged in creating employment, or whether it can ever play a valuable public service role in an over-commercialized broadcast space?”¹⁵²

While there are no studies on public perception of the broadcaster, Indian blogs on media offer some indications. The non-profit lobby group (and blog) “Friends of Prasar Bharati”¹⁵³ aims to “defend and promote [AIR] and [DD] in its vital role ... to inform, educate and entertain the public” and is a resource base of news related to Prasar Bharati. DD remains a focus in blogs written mostly by those who grew up watching the (then only) channel in the 1980s. Many such sites¹⁵⁴ provide a collection of clips from old DD serials and public service ads, rating them favorably over current soaps and reality shows.

Prominent political parties belonging to the three main ideological streams, the Center (Congress), the Right (Bharatiya Janata Party, BJP), and the Left (Communist Party of India, CPI, and Community Party of India (Marxist), CPI (M)), stress the need for a strong public service broadcaster. All supported the Prasar Bharati Bill initiated in 1989 by the National Front government.¹⁵⁵ However, even though the Act was ratified in 1997, its effective autonomy continues to be debated.

The CPI and CPI (M)¹⁵⁶ explicitly stated in their election manifestos that Prasar Bharati “must be strengthened”¹⁵⁷ and supported the Prasar Bharati Amendment Bill, 2010 to improve the service conditions

149. Financial irregularities by Prasar Bharati CEO B.S. Lalli were established by the Central Vigilance Commission related to contracts for managing advertising revenue arising from sporting events. He was later suspended.

150. B.G. Verghese, “Sad Story of Prasar Bharati,” at <http://www.thehoot.org/web/home/story.php?sectionId=14&mod=1&pg=1&valid=true&storyid=4666> (accessed 19 May 2011).

151. “At 50, Doordarshan beams to a challenging tomorrow,” at <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/26313/at-50-door-darshan-beams-challenging.html> (accessed 10 May 2011).

152. Sevanti Ninan, “Media Matters: Can we afford Prasar Bharati?” *The Hindu*, 18 September, 2010, at http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/columns/Sevanti_Ninan/article674363.ece (accessed 10 May 2011).

153. See <http://friendsofprasarbharati.org> (accessed 3 December 2012).

154. See <http://oldidiotbox.blogspot.com/>; <http://www.desidabba.org/2007/02/20/the-old-idiot-box-best-of-door-darshan-days/>; <http://ddnational.blogspot.com> (accessed 3 December 2012).

155. The National Front was in power from 1980 to 1990, a coalition led by the Janata Dal and supported from the outside both by the left parties and the BJP.

156. The CPI and the CPI (M) have never led a coalition but have occasionally supported the Congress-led government.

157. “1998 LS Election–Joint Left Manifesto,” at <http://cpim.org/content/1998-ls-election-joint-left-manifesto> (accessed 5 January 2012).

of its employees.¹⁵⁸ The Congress and BJP have also called for greater autonomy in their manifestos,¹⁵⁹ but in practice have used their position to contain it. The Congress government of the last eight years has been marked by revelations of political interference and financial malpractice in Prasar Bharati. The BJP, while in opposition, called for making it autonomous,¹⁶⁰ but when in power in 1998, its MIB minister Sushma Swaraj tried to help remove board members seen as left-leaning.

2.2.2 Public Service Provision in Commercial Media

A few public service obligations exist on the commercial media that are only partly related to digitization, such as the must-carry provision obliging cable operators to carry two DD national channels and a regional channel in the prime band and five in the non-prime band.¹⁶¹ This is specified in the Cable Television Networks Act 1995 and applies to C&S and DTH services.¹⁶² Broadcasters resent this, claiming Prasar Bharati demands a huge carriage fee for channel space on its DTH platform.¹⁶³

Another obligation on the private television broadcaster is the mandatory sharing of special sports feeds with the public broadcaster. Only applicable to DD terrestrial/DTH¹⁶⁴ and not DD satellite channels, this was mandated in the public interest to provide access to viewers in poor and remote areas. The FCCI argued that it should not be enacted: “[Costs] of these anti-competitive effects outweigh any alleged benefits to the community arising from having the system in place.”¹⁶⁵

K. Aravamudhan, Senior Manager at Star India Private Limited, says: “Sports telecast rights are the most expensive on television ... If you ask private broadcasters to include public service content, you are asking the wrong person to do the wrong thing ... The public broadcaster gets a large amount of largesse to carry out this task, whereas the private broadcasters are always struggling to make revenues, especially in the non-subscription news channels.”¹⁶⁶

Indeed, there are no obligations on commercial broadcasters regarding content.

158. In 2008, their unions, the Centre of Indian Trade Unions (CITU) and the All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) actively supported the various strikes called by NFADE, an umbrella organization of 21 AIR and DD service associations, demanding amendment of the Prasar Bharati Act.

159. The BJP listed the following agenda in its policy on Media, Cinema, and Arts: “Improve the provisions of the *Prasar Bharati Act* to let Prasar Bharati organize an effective public broadcasting system accountable to Parliament but free from Government control, immune from political influence and sensitive to the diverse needs of Indian society,” at <http://www.indiancabletv.net/BJPmediapolicy.htm> (accessed 5 January 2012).

160. “BJP says make Prasar Bharati autonomous body,” at <http://www.samachar.com/bjp-says-make-prasar-bharati-autonomous-body-lmiqNVajcfi.html> (accessed 24 July 2011).

161. These include Rajya Sabha, Lok Sabha, DD Sports, Gyandarshan, and DD Urdu.

162. The MIB, in its notification dated 26 November 2007, named eight channels that had to be compulsorily carried as per Clause 7.8 of the DTH license. These include DD National, DD News, Lok Sabha TV, DD Rajya Sabha (now Rajya Sabha TV), DD Bharati, DD Sports, DD Urdu Channel, and Gyandarshan.

163. TRAI, “Comments on TRAI Consultation Paper on Tariff for Cable Services,” June 2007, at http://www.trai.gov.in/ConsultationPapers_content.asp (accessed 2 April 2011).

164. “It has not been decided whether this Act will also apply to DTT,” interview with N.V. Ramana, Director General (Engineering), Doordarshan, New Delhi, 2 May 2012.

165. FICCI, “Advocacy Note to Prasar Bharati,” at <http://www.indiantelevision.com/headlines/y2k5/sep/sep79.htm> (accessed 17 April 2011).

166. Interview with K. Aravamudhan, Senior Manager at Star India Private Limited, New Delhi, 22 April 2011.

2.3 Assessments

Digital take-up of Prasar Bharati's terrestrial feed has yet to take off at an expected scale in television and radio, given that the sunset year for completing the switch-over is 2017. The process of setting up transmitters, which started in 2003 for DD and in 2007 for AIR, is still in a pilot phase. So it is premature to assess progress. The government hopes to bring prices down for viewers and listeners of the state-owned digitized channels, but doubts remain about demand—especially in the case of television since there seems to be no vision for having diverse or localized content on the existing channels. To augment demand, cost and convergence must be addressed along with content planning—which is intimately connected to envisioning a new role for the public broadcaster in India.

On the issue of new media, the public broadcaster has taken some initiatives (websites, mobile television services, dial-in, and SMS-based content) that could help expand its reach among a diverse constituency and improve interactivity.

Media policy in India since the 1990s reveals that the government was keen to create conducive conditions for private media, but was equally concerned about the public broadcaster's survival amid falling revenue and viewership. Many decisions were taken to ensure its health, as well as to expand access and diversity, including the launch of newer, more commercial channels, must-carry provisions, mandatory sports feeds sharing, and first-mover advantage in DTH, mobile television, and HDTV services. Still, if significance is assessed on quality and independence, then the broadcaster does not fare well; the question of autonomy also remains unresolved.

Despite occasional propositions to variously privatize, shut, or scale down particular services and/or the infrastructure of Prasar Bharati, the public broadcaster will continue to receive support from the exchequer, however haphazardly. At the dawn of 2013, the government approved a proposal for Prasar Bharati's financial restructuring while waiving a debt of over Rs13 billion, or over US\$ 200 million.¹⁶⁷ Such generosity is not so much due to upholding the principles and values of public broadcasting as a compulsion to pander to entrenched interests, especially of its large staff—which even a decade ago was unimaginably larger than requisite.¹⁶⁸ Unless it is backed by a genuine political will, organizationally refurbished and editorially liberalized, as is perceived to a limited extent for Lok Sabha TV, Prasar Bharati's significance is likely to decline. Paradoxically, this possible decline in its appeal over the next few years may unfold at a time when it gets to own high-quality infrastructure for its DTT service.

167. "Digitisation, FDI in broadcasting issues highlights of I&B Ministry in 2012," *Economic Times*, 2 January 2013, at <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/news-by-industry/media/entertainment-/media/digitisation-fdi-in-broadcasting-issues-highlights-of-ib-ministry-in-2012/articleshow/17854103.cms> (accessed 3 January 2013).

168. *Report of Committee to Study the Working of the Prasar Bharati Corporation, Government of India*, 1999, quoted earlier, found the engineering staff employed by Doordarshan and All India Radio to be 36 times larger than needed, as per international standards.