

Parties' criticism our best certificate: Gill

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Jan. 8
"The fact that all political parties are criticising our coverage of news is our best certificate," Mr S. S. Gill told a crowded Press conference here today.

Mr Gill was reacting sharply to criticism of over projection of Ms Sonia Gandhi as personality of the week on Doordarshan. Mr Gill pointed out that Sonia's decision to campaign for the Congress was lead story in all newspapers and the news team in DD had exercised its discretion in projecting her.

But the tremendous flak DD has received for its coverage, has made the CEO take a personal look at the tape. He maintains that the coverage was balanced and of 10 minutes of the tape, three had gone to Sonia and seven to others, including BJP spokesperson Sushma Swaraj who was extremely critical of Sonia.

Mr Gill said programmes on personality of the week had been

done on two other politicians — Mr P. Sangma and Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav without drawing flak.

The BJP, he maintained, had got maximum coverage on Doordarshan.

The CEO has had two charts prepared showing the coverage given to political parties in DD's evening bulletins (Hindi and English) from Dec. 20 to 31 and in news bulletins of various channels from Jan. 1 to 6 this year.

Fat salaries lure bureaucrats

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Aug. 17

The exit of Ratikant Basu, Secretary, Electronics and former D-G, Doordarshan, on Oct. 1 to head Star TV's South Asia operations signals a new trend of senior bureaucrats with market value opting out of Government service while still on top.

In fact Star chief Rupert Murdoch's recent visit to India was to meet Mr Basu and offer him the assignment. The two were closeted for four hours. It is learnt that Mr Basu gave his three months notice to the Government on July 1. Though uplinking from India would undoubtedly be more convenient and economical for Star, the Chinese Government has assured continuance of the uplinking facilities from Hong Kong even after 1997 when the island comes under its control.

With nearly 80 Secretaries to Government today, the once coveted job of Secretary to Government has lost its charm as well as status. Instead of the fiefdoms that they once lorded over, ministries have been cut and chopped to the

extent that they are no more than small principalities. Twenty years ago there were just 15 to 20 Secretaries and they reigned supreme. Today the Cabinet Secretariat alone has eight Secretaries including one to look after just security.

Further, bureaucrats feel that seniority and merit no longer ensure their rise to the top job of Cabinet Secretary or even a Secretary. Earlier it was the politicians who were building up bureaucrats on the basis of personal loyalties and allegiance. Now it is the bureaucrats who not only bad-mouth their colleagues but actually pull down what their predecessors have worked on.

This is particularly apparent in the Information and Broadcasting Ministry where the work of the former I&B Secretary Bhaskar Ghose and Mr Basu is being systematically undermined. In fact both DD-3 and the International Channel which were conceived for quality programming and to counter Pakistan propaganda overseas respectively are on the verge of closure.

While Basu, who has a good chance of becoming Cabinet Secretary, is the first Secretary to

Government to resign in June the Chief Income Tax Commissioner of Delhi and President of the Indian Revenue Service Officers Association, Mr S. K. Roy, resigned. Mr Roy had protested when his colleagues who had gone on a raid to Meerut were beaten up. Roy demanded that income tax officers going out on raids should be provided protection. But his senior colleagues in the IAS did not support him and Roy was posted to Kanpur. Humiliated, the officer resigned from Government and has gone back to his home State, Orissa.

Within Doordarshan, in the last two years while Mr R. K. Singh, an IAS officer of the rank of Director left and joined the sports channel ESPN, the bright programme cadre officer Ashok Okra left DD to join the Discovery Channel.

With a five-year contract on the cards, a fat pay packet and the backing of Murdoch, Mr Basu is expected to build his own team and offer serious challenge not just to Zee TV, but to Doordarshan which is currently limping along starved of resources.

In fact, Mr Subhash Chandra

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Bureaucrats fall for fat packets

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along with his new Chief Executive Officer V. G. Jindal is trying to delay if not scuttle the appointment of Mr Basu. With Murdoch holding 49 per cent of the shares of Zee TV, Mr Basu will be his representative on the Zee board.

Mr Subhash Chandra has reason to worry for Mr Basu is likely to Indianise Star TV operations. There is talk of a full-fledged Hindi channel being launched and this would dent into Zee's viewership. Mr Basu, with uncanny business sense, will retain the English pro-

grammes that have a select audience and attract advertisements despite Star TV's low rating.

With BBC being eased out of the Star network, there are bright chances for a full-fledged news channel on Star TV. The Ghose/Basu team had worked hard to improve the news on Doordarshan by bringing in private newscasters like Prannoy Roy, Dileep Padgaonkar and others. Many of them are disgruntled with their news programmes being pushed around. All of them can now look forward to a new channel and an old trusted lieutenant to steer them along.

EXPRESS DIARY

How's that?

IN a bid to counter competition from Entertainment Sports Professional Network (ESPN), soon to become a pay channel, Prime Sports is negotiating with the Test and County Cricket Board of England to telecast all English domestic cricket matches where Indian stars figure.

At present, Javagal Srinath, Anil Kumble and Manoj Prabhakar play for English counties and Prime Sports intends to follow their performances through the domestic season between May and September.

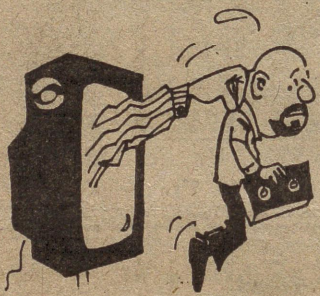
Of course, whatever efforts Prime Sports makes to telecast international cricket will pale into insignificance in view of Doordarshan's stranglehold on the forthcoming World Cup. But both ESPN and Prime Sports are doing their best to get a satellite broadcast release from the state network.

But, for now, building new stars in other sports seems the best option. Hence the 10-year contract for exclusive broadcast rights to Indian football between Prime Sports and the All-India Football Federation.

As Kelly Butler, Head of Sports, Star TV, puts it: "We've realised that we'd do best if we followed the careers of Indian sportspersons wherever and whenever they play abroad."

Watch stops

WITH the exit of Mr K. P. Singh Deo from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, the last extension has been given to Mr Pritish Nandy's News Watch. With a mounting pile of complaints from newspaper editors and senior journalists from the print media, the mandarins of Mandi House have for quite some time been keen to wind up the programme.



K. P. SINGH DEO

Mr Nandy, it was found, was using the programme for journalist-bashing rather than for an analysis of the content of news stories. He was a school buddy of the former minister and in that lay his staying power.

Mr P. A. Sangma, the new head of this high-profile min-

istry, is quite different. He has no favourites — no school or political friends he would like to oblige by either giving them programmes or showing their mug shots on TV. His only passion is to promote the Prime Minister and Government programmes!

Diwali dread

IS there anybody who awaits Diwali tense and with trepidation every year? Yes, the security personnel posted at the residences of VIPs and VVIPs.

Besides their normal duty, they are burdened with the job of screening numerous gift pockets. They can't freely open the packets and yet they have to ensure these are bomb-free!

While Diwali is shopping time to others, many businessmen and industrialists find it an ideal occasion to try and propitiate those holding powerful posts in the Government with presents. This makes the happy season one of serious hazards for those charged with the safety of persons in the higher echelons of the establishment.

It is anyone's guess whether the love and regard the gifts are claimed to represent will continue after the retirement of officers or the ouster from power of politician. What is certain to continue is the grave occupational hazard for their guards.

Sensing the purpose behind them, many politely return the gifts. If more of them do so, it will be a happier Diwali for the security men and their families.

Private, public

IT is privatisation of a different kind that a former legislator in Karnataka has been accused of.

Running a private primary school in a Government building, utilising water meant for drinking water supply on a private farm and drilling bore wells at Government cost in a private farm are charges being faced by Mr B. H. Venka Naik, who represented the Harapanahalli reserved constituency in the Bellary district during the Congress rule. The Lokayukta is investigating these cases.

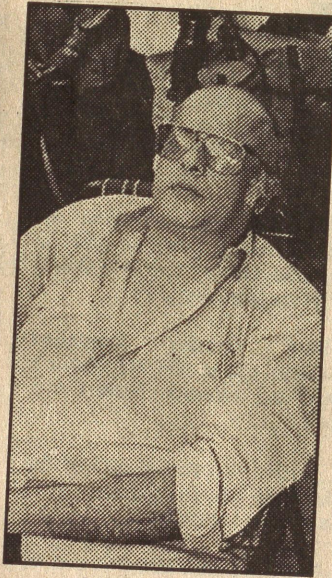
Recently, Rural Development Minister M.P. Prakash told the State Assembly that the inquiry was handed over to Lokayukta by then Congress Government. The investigation had, however, been showed down and the present Government would speed up the matter.

Kaveree Bamzai, Usha Rai, M. Gopal, Delhi; Shama Sunder, Bangalore

I should have the right to see porn films, says Bhatt

by Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Jan 9



Mahesh Bhatt...
Self-confessed porn lover

THE well-known director, Mr Mahesh Bhatt, created quite a stir at a recent consultation on media policy when he confessed to being an archetypal "Indian male jungli" who enjoys seeing pornographic films.

Notwithstanding his elevation as chairman of the Film and Television Training Institute of India, Mr Bhatt demanded that his right to see pornographic films be upheld.

"I am an adult and have the right to see and read pornography if I chose to," he stated. Then accusing those present of hypocrisy, Mr Bhatt said he had even met a joint secretary of the Ministry who professed he had

nothing against soft porn.

The meeting, attended by senior officials of the Information and Broadcasting Ministry; representatives of film industry; the Chairman of the Sub-Committee of the Parliamentary Consultative Committee of the I&B Ministry for the Media Policy, Mr Ram Vilas Paswan, and MPs Mrs Geeta Mukherji, Mr Rup Chand Pal and Mr J.P. Mathur, discussed film policy within the general framework of a media policy.

Though there was general support for a film policy, it was felt it should be in conformity with the approach on the print media and the electronic media. As there was no censorship of the print media or the satellite channels beaming straight into homes, the film industry felt it

should not be singled out for censorship.

According to representatives of the Indian Motion Pictures Association and the Film Makers' Combine, censorship should come from within the industry as in the US and Japan.

Mr Bhatt pointed out that the direct telecast of Parliament proceedings could be as vulgar as any product of the Bombay film industry. While expressing her unhappiness at the lack of decorum in Parliament, Mrs Geeta Mukherji said that did not give the Bombay film industry the licence to produce just what it pleased.

Mr Paswan and Mr Pal confirmed Mr Bhatt's outburst.

However, apparently his views were not echoed by other representatives of the film industry. Both Mr Shakti Samanta, who heads the Central

Board for Film Certification (CBFC), and music director Naushad Ali, supported film censorship. They pointed out that a certified film gave protection to the film producer. Uncensored films would lead to endless litigation in courts for obscenity and indecent representation of women.

But Mr Samanta admitted that with 800 to 900 films being produced every year, it was difficult for the censors to scrutinise all of them. Only a few manage to escape the eyes of the censors, he stated. Mr Rup Chand Pal expressed his unhappiness at the CBFC's domination by the film industry. Though there were 18 women on the Board, they too were from the industry, he said.

Mrs Jaya Bachchan pleaded that mainstream producers make children's films and screen them

in the general theatres. The problem of finding theatres for screening children's films, whose tickets were priced low, was discussed.

It was suggested that all theatres be asked to reserve time on weekends for children's films. Another suggestion was to show these films in schools and institutional auditoriums which are under-utilised.

Mr Ramanand Sagar assured that if there were enough theatres, mainstream producers would make children's films.

There was heated discussion too on finances for the film industry. Mr Rup Chand Pal said that if film production was declared an industry, access to bank funding would be made easier. However, as industry status would subject the film world to labour laws, the suggestion was rejected.

Lack big money? Forget bidding for DD-3 channel

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Jan. 17
Only rich business houses capable of investing close to Rs 1,500 crore can put in a bid for joint ownership of DD-3 after the broadcasting Bill is introduced and passed in the coming Budget session of Parliament.

India Today, which has been inching forward in the electronic media with video cassettes—News Track—and news and current affairs programmes like Aaj Tak, has expressed interest in submitting its bid for DD-3.

A note prepared for the Cabinet by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting states that the terrestrial rights of DD-3 should be expanded by setting up about 40 high power transmitters (HPTs) in major towns of the country.

The cost of a HPT, which has a radius of about 80 kms, is Rs 10 crore. So 40 HPTs would cost Rs 400 crore. Whoever puts in a bid for DD-3 will have to bear the cost of the transmitters. The bidder will also have to make the initial pay-

ment for the Government's share of 51 per cent in addition to his own share—49 per cent for DD-3.

Engineers and technical support to man the HPTs will have to be found. Money will also have to be invested in a marketing unit for DD-3 and some infrastructure for an office in Delhi. However, with DD-3 going terrestrial it will have as wide a reach as DD-2, also visible in about 40 cities.

The Government quite clearly does not have enough money for DD-1 and DD-2, to think of investing in DD-3. The 51 per cent invested on behalf of the Government can be recovered through an agreed, pre-determined arrangement.

There has been a marked shift in the concept of DD-3 since the channel was launched during the Congress regime. From a channel that was meant to be serious, catering to those interested in arts and literature, it is now being remodelled to make it a monetarily viable channel.

Though DD-2 or the Metro channel continues to be entertainment oriented, Information and Broadcasting Minister C. M. Ibrahim is keen to label DD-1 and DD-2 as public interest broadcast channels.

As major shareholders, the policy and programming of the joint venture DD-3 will be determined by the mandarins of Mandi House. Education, sports and the movie club will be the dominant features of DD-3.

Though cross media ownership (a newspaper magnate owning an electronic channel) is not favoured in most countries and may not find support in the broadcasting Bill, an official in the I and B Ministry said the concept of "grandfathering" is recognised in the US. Persons running a newspaper and a radio or TV station in the US before the introduction of the law checking dual ownership are called "grandfathers" and are allowed to retain dual ownership.

Serials on golden jubilee of Independence

Controversy over selection of producers

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Feb. 17

Five of India's top film producers — Shyam Benegal, Girish Karnad, Buddhadev Dasgupta, Bhupen Hazarika and Sayeed Mirza have been invited to produce serials, each of 13 episodes, on the golden jubilee of India's Independence for Doordarshan.

However, a major controversy is brewing on the selection of these five persons, however eminent, for making the programmes when none of them had applied for doing something substantial for television on the mammoth 50 year celebrations.

Ironically, some of these producers in the early 80s had questioned the decision of the Government to award the film on Mahatma Gandhi to Richard Attenborough, ignoring the talent in the country. It was seen as an unpatriotic move on the part of the then Prime Minister Mrs Indira Gandhi to award such a film to a foreigner — and a Britisher to boot.

The film, Gandhi, it may be re-

called, was a great hit and the protest petered out.

In the present case, Doordarshan received close to 600 proposals — many of them from producers not quite as famous as Buddhadev Dasgupta or Shyam Benegal but of proven competence who have already left their mark on both the big and small screens. The flood of applications included docu-dramas, fiction and serials and was to be processed by the special cell on 50 years of India's Independence headed by DDG Kazi Anees-ul-Haq.

It was in the first half of last September that producers were invited to submit proposals, deposit the processing fee of Rs 2000 and five copies of the script of the first episode. By the end of September the process fee was raised to Rs 5000. While 76 persons deposited Rs 2000, the rest gave a higher fee.

Of the nearly 600 applications, a short list of 200 was prepared and then this was again pruned to 100. Then another two files were prepared of VIP projects and general category projects. After this great

build up, higher ups in the Information and Broadcasting Ministry decided to invite the real big names in the business to make a series of 13 episodes each.

Doordarshan's Director-General K. S. Sarma, however, justified the Government decision to give it to people who had not applied on the grounds that the proposals received were for serials on unknown or little known, unsung freedom fighters. DD, he said, had no desire to detract from the significant roles played by each of those great freedom fighters. But the national broadcaster, he said, did not have enough slots to project all of them. It wanted a broader canvas and a panoramic view of India's 50 years of Independence.

Mr Sarma, however, was not willing to disclose the theme of the selected serials since the producers want it to be a surprise. Each of the eminent film makers will get Rs 5 to 6 lakh per episode produced.

In the current year, Mr Sarma said, Doordarshan had received Rs 8 crore for programming on the golden jubilee. In all Rs 25 crore

had been sanctioned.

But other producers need not be disappointed. Each of the 15 DD Kendras is being given a substantial sum of programmes on the 50 years of India's Independence. Producers will be paid Rs 2 to Rs 3 lakh per episode. All three channels of Doordarshan will have one programme every week on India's Independence, Mr Sarma assures.

Mr Haq assures that quality will be the hallmark of programmes selected for the regional kendras too. Selecting the best programmes for such a historic occasion, he says, is a bit like selecting a good cricket team. There may be a 100 good players. But you have to select only 11.

Among those who had put in proposals are Mr Lekh Tandon, who made *Dulhan wohi jo piya man bhaye*, Prem Kumar of *Gul Gulshan Gulsham*, Rashmi Kant of Zoom Communication, Nadira Babbar, Umesh Saigal, playwright Rewati Sharan Sharma and Begum Abida Ahmed, who had produced *Shahjahanabad ki Kahani* for DD.

Women demand Bhatt's removal from FTII

by Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Feb 26: Almost two months after Mr Mahesh Bhatt's public postulation about his right to watch pornography, representatives of women's organisations and those concerned about morality in public life met Information and Broadcasting Minister P A Sangma today and demanded the removal of Mr Bhatt from the chairmanship of the Governing Council of the Film and Television Institute of India.

They also asked Mr Sangma to evolve a Code of Decency and take steps to curb the growing vulgarity and violence in the media. Mr Sangma later assured the setting of a committee with representatives of women's groups to evolve a Code of Decency for all media.

In fact Ms Rami Chhabra, Stre-e-bal, had written to the Ministry in January, expressing anguish at the lack of immediate action by the government on Mr Bhatt's statement. At today's meeting Mr Sangma said it was

only fair that in a democratic society Mr Bhatt should be given a hearing. He said he had been collecting the necessary information on the issue and assured that action was on the cards.

However, the men and women who met Mr Sangma did not want Mr Bhatt to be given an opportunity to step down. They wanted him sacked so that a message goes out to those in responsible positions that such views will not be tolerated. In his present position, they pointed out, Mr Bhatt played a major role in formulating media policy for the country and in moulding the minds of creative youth.

"Names of officers in my ministry have been dragged into this unsavoury controversy," the minister said. "I share your concern," said Mr Sangma, trying to assuage the angry men and women.

The delegation, led by Ms Chhabra, included Vimla Farooqi of the National Federation of Indian Women, Aparna Basu of the All India Women's Confer-

ence, Ranjana Kumari of the Mahila Dakshita Samiti, V P Srivastava of the Azadi Bachao Andolan and S L Jain of the Forum of Public Schools.

Mr Bhatt's statement and the explicit scenes of sex and violence on television could be related to the deluge of complaints of sexual harassment and even rape, the women said.

An audio cassette of a Times FM recording that was extremely provocative and pornographic was also given to Mr Sangma. In the names of sex education and liberalisation all kinds of tapes are being broadcast, they pointed out.

Mr Sangma said it was to contain the dirty scenes and violence in films, that 50 per cent representation had been given to women in film certification boards. Ms Chhabra and others immediately replied that it appears that the wrong women and those without the necessary time for viewing films were being put on the committees.

Even in the US, President Clinton had warned cable operators

against showing too much violence, it was pointed out. Mr Sangma was confident that he could control the permissiveness and sex in films and TV programmes but was not so sure about controlling violence. "I am not sure where and when to draw the line between assault and violence," he said.

Mr Sangma regretted he had not been able to do much in the Information and Broadcasting Ministry. He believed in having discussion to sort out controversial issues, but there is no time for that, he said.

"Serials with several episodes had been cleared and lakhs of rupees paid in advance. If I stop them, the producers go to the courts," he said. Through the DD serials, we are imposing middle class culture on all people, said Mr Sangma. Referring to the commercialisation of television, Mr Sangma admitted that the advertisements were increasing the consumer appetite of the people, even though the majority of people are unable to afford the goodies.

MPs urge President to prevent Govt 'misuse' of airwaves

by Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, March 28

ONE hundred and six members of Parliament, including leaders of major political parties, have urged the President to take immediate steps to ensure that the "airwaves are not misused" by the Government on the eve of elections.

The letter was presented to the President on Tuesday by a delegation of MPs and members of Jan Prasar, a citizens' initiative for radio and television. In a 40-minute meeting, they held the Government solely responsible for the airwaves imbroglio and pointed out the danger to the

democratic polity from the misuse of Doordarshan and private satellite channels by the Government.

"The need for credible, independent and autonomous national radio and TV networks is even more critically felt on the eve of the general elections," they told the President.

Those meeting with Dr Shanker Dayal Sharma included former Speaker Rabi Ray, CPM veteran Nilotpal Basu, journalist Kuldip Nayar, documentary film maker Suhas Borker and human rights activist N.D. Pancholi.

The MPs also asked the President to demand an explanation from the Government for the scuttling of the Prasar Bharati Act for the past

five years.

The letter endorsed by 97 MPs of the 10th Lok Sabha and nine from Rajya Sabha assailed the Prime Minister's personal projection on Doordarshan as "blatantly partisan."

It said "Doordarshan has been reduced to "a Government mouthpiece" and attempts were being made to "manufacture" consent and consensus for Government policies through the airwaves before the general elections.

"Broadcasting must be recognised as a public resource. The paradigm shift in the electronic media from a developmental model to an elitist consumer model has to be reversed." The MPs called for

restructured radio and TV network that could be used as "instruments to support the strategy of socio-economic development through people's participation at the grass-roots level."

The autonomy of the electronic media, they said, should be safeguarded not only from political and bureaucratic control but also from subversion by commercial interests.

The current commercial siege on broadcasting had to be lifted and commercial sponsorship delinked from programme content on Doordarshan and AIR, said the letter.

"The airwaves are being made a tool of a narrow, affluent class — projecting their consumerism and

decadent lifestyle and dreams. Advertising which mocks the poor for their poverty, promotes false values and creates bogus status symbols should have no place in our network," the MPs stated. "By not freeing Doordarshan and AIR from Government control, the Government has denied a 'public resource' to the people," they added.

Signatories to the letter include Somnath Chatterji, Malini Bhattacharya, Rupchand Pal, Ram Vilas Paswan, I.K. Gujral, Jaipal Reddy, Jaswant Singh, Sushma Swaraj, Indrajit Gupta, Geeta Mukherjee, Arjun Singh, P.R. Kumaramangalam, George Fernandes and Chitta Basu.

Politicking on TV comes with a price tag

by Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, April 2: The Election Commission is considering a proposal of the Information and Broadcasting Ministry that all TV networks should be allowed to levy a fee as per their rate card to individuals as well as political parties wishing to use the electronic media for projecting themselves or their party.

It has also been suggested that money spent on personal and political propaganda on the electronic media should be included in the amount allowed per candidate.

These were among the most significant suggestions made at a meeting of the Deputy Election Commissioner Subas Pani with over 15 heads of TV units dealing with news and current affairs. Doordarshan, which felt it

would lose its current edge of having the largest viewership if the Election Commission's code of ethics for the electronic media was limited to the national broadcaster, is upbeat after confirmation that the code applies uniformly to all TV networks, including satellite channels.

A proposal for pure advertisement of political parties on the electronic media is also being looked into.

Asked how the EC could check violation of its code by the numerous channels now jockeying for attention, an official of the I&B Ministry said the EC can tell the Reserve Bank of India not to release the foreign exchange for the period in which the satellite channel broke the election code.

Private channels, which apply to the Reserve Bank for foreign exchange permits already give a written undertaking that they will abide by the country's broadcasting code, advertising code and programme code. Now the EC's code for the elections can be included.

NDTV has again bagged the election coverage on DD-1. For 36 hours on May 7 and 8, the duo of Prannoy Roy and Vinod Dua will be conducting the programme and giving an update of results. Doordarshan is likely to dole out Rs 50 lakhs to NDTV for coverage on these two days. However, over and above this amount whatever money is earned through sponsorship will be shared with Doordarshan.

On the last day of polling, Nalini Singh will be doing the

exit poll on DD-1. TV Today has also put in a proposal for election coverage on DD-2 in Hindi. However, since this may cut into the programme on the main channel, the top bosses of Mandi House are still mulling over the proposal.

However, several private producers will be doing pre-poll stories. While Pritish Nandy has proposed 'Candidate Watch', Shahsi Mehta will look at the political positions of each state in the last couple of elections. There will also be inhouse programmes, discussions as well as clips on voters rights.

Each party will get 15 minutes from 8.50 pm to 9.05 pm on DD-1 to talk about the party and its manifesto. There will be a draw of lots to decide who will begin the poll broadcasts.

Star TV's DTH plan irks Ibrahim

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, April 4 Information and Broadcasting Minister C. M. Ibrahim has asked the Cabinet Secretary to call a meeting of Secretaries of Information and Broadcasting, Telecommunication and Law and look into the Star TV's game plan to launch its Direct To Home (DTH) service when the Broadcasting Bill has not even been introduced in Parliament.

Addressing a packed hall in Shastri Bhavan in what seemed like a pre-election Press conference to extoll the achievements of the two ministries he heads— Civil Aviation and Information and Broadcasting — Mr Ibrahim warned foreign TV channels against soliciting viewers for their proposed DTH before the law is framed and the Broadcast Authority set up.

It is learnt that Mr Ibrahim was in fact advised by the bureaucrats not to hold the Press conference or make policy announcements till April 11.

Several questions were asked on the ethics of his holding the Press conference — the second since he assumed office. However Mr Ibrahim brushed aside this saying governance had to continue and constitutionally he could make policy decisions till the Government was in power.

But the media continued to question him about his "farewell" conference. Tomorrow Telecommunication Minister Beni Prasad Verma is also holding a press conference. Doordarshan's statement, released to the media, says "significant achievements made by Doordarshan during 1996-97.

All those selling decoders or bringing in equipment for DTH operations, Mr Ibrahim warned, would be prosecuted under the Indian Telegraph Act of 1844. He expressed his determination to stop the foreign channel ruling the air waves through its Indian Sky Broadcasting. The committee of secretaries will see what legal action can be taken to prevent the back door entry of Sky Broadcast-

ing through digitised compressed signals on C Band.

The earlier Government ordinance was only against DTH on Ku Band. Now even cable operators and the public at large are being told not to cooperate with Star's plans for Sky broadcasting.

When a correspondent pointed out that his Cabinet colleague's son had agreed to join the Star platform, Mr Ibrahim said he had no idea about what sons of Ministers were doing. On Star's offer to Doordarshan to join its platform, Mr Ibrahim said the decision would be taken by the DD after it becomes its own master under the Prasar Bharati Act. The offer of the Malaysian company, Measat, to launch a DTH service in collaboration with India was also on hold, he stated.

Questioned about what seemed like a war against Star TV, Mr Ibrahim said India has the strongest democracy. Challenge to its prestige and honour by doing something illegal will not be tolerated, he stated. In an obvious reference to Star TV's Ratikant Basu, he said a section of officers had quit Government to join the

foreign network without cooling off for two years. If they do something illegal we will prosecute them, he added.

But it was for the Gujarat Government and the Department of Personnel to take action against him, he said. Action, he said, was also proposed against those from the Information and Broadcasting Services who had transgressed Government rules in working with a foreign network. The Government has written to the concerned officials.

Mr Ibrahim sought to remove doubts in public mind about the Doordarshan. DD is ahead of other channels in India. In 1996-97 it had raked in revenue of Rs 572 crore, which was Rs 142 crore or 33 per cent increase over the previous year. If he continued to run the Ministry for the next three years he was confident the DD would generate Rs 1,000 crore. AIR too had crossed the Rs 100 crore mark, the Minister said. Two FM channels were ready for broadcast in Mumbai, Delhi, Bangalore and Chennai. The Government would hire it out per hour for a whopping fee.

Acting D-G not in race for DD's top post

by Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, April 8: The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) will decide on a permanent Director-General for Doordarshan on April 15 from a list of about 10 candidates, most of them of the rank of DDG, and eligible for promotion. However, the acting D-G, K.S. Sarma, does not figure in the list.

Even though the UPSC will complete its formalities next week, the appointment is not likely to come through before the new Government is installed. The UPSC selection will be forwarded back to the Ministry and from there to the Cabinet Committee for Appointments.

In fact, it was Sarma who, as Joint Secretary, Broadcasting, in the Ministry, processed the file and forwarded the names of the

aspirants for the coveted post. Sarma, it is learnt, is not interested in the job which calls for technical as well as managerial skills. He is said to be keen to get back to a Ministerial assignment.

The Government has had to speed up the process for appointment after four DDGs — Nirmal Sikdar, M.P. Lele, S. Krishnan and T.R. Malakar — went to CAT last year on the delay in appointment of a permanent DG and staked their claims to the post. Krishnan, who is now with AIR, was, in fact, acting DG in DD for a brief spell before K.P. Singh Deo moved him out.

A four-month deadline was given by CAT last October for recruitment as per Government rules. The names of all four officers, it had said, should be included in the list of eligible candidates. Two months later,

the Government issued a circular inviting other applications, too, for the post. After the expiry of the deadline, a contempt case was filed against the I&B Ministry for not adhering to the CAT deadline.

The Ministry sought a little more time and speeded up the appointment process. It was the continued pressure from senior officials within Doordarshan that has forced the pace of what I&B Secretary S. Gopalan calls "the departmental promotion committee meeting in the UPSC".

However, some of those who have qualified are likely to retire before the appointment comes through. The seniormost of the DDGs is Sikdar, who has been in the post since January 1987. Lele, extremely unhappy about the reign of the IAS, has moved

to AIR. Both have just a few months left for superannuation.

While all the four officers, who have been moving CAT for redressal, belong to the programme service, engineers and officers of the information service have also put in their bid.

Among those in the race are Harish Awasthi, who heads the News and Current Affairs unit of the national channel, K.C.C. Raja, DD's chief engineer who is due to retire soon, and H.M. Joshi of the engineering cadre of AIR. Awasthi belongs to the Indian Information Service, but since technology has played a major role in the growth of DD, engineers feel they have a right to the key post. Earlier, Bimla Bhalla, who has since moved as Additional Secretary in the Cabinet Secretariat, had also

applied for the post.

Surprisingly, there seems to be no IAS contenders for the high-profile post. A source in the UPSC said whoever opted for the DD post, would have to give up claims on the parent cadre. Some people from the Income Tax and Customs are also believed to have applied. That the current DG's term would be brief, was well known, but it is doubtful if anyone expected to be quite this brief.

Of course, there is always the possibility of the UPSC not finding a single candidate suitable, restarting the whole process of finding a permanent DG.

The last permanent D-G of DD was Shiv Sharma and it was after a long struggle that he had a short stint at the top.

Rugged, cheaper colour TVs to target rural masses

by Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, May 22: This Diwali, the Department of Electronics hopes to give a special gift to the village communities — a 20 / 21 inch colour television priced below Rs 10,000 which it hopes to call the Krishak TV.

The man behind the colour TV revolution for rural India is R. Basu, the former D-G of Doordarshan and now secretary, Electronic.

Eighty five per cent of the population is covered by the large network of Doordarshan but the rural masses cannot afford the colour TV sets now in the market as most of them cost between Rs 12,500 and Rs 20,000.

Having worked for the spread of Doordarshan, Basu now plans to push the industry to manufacture rugged and affordable colour TV sets that can withstand the

tremendous power fluctuation in rural areas. Videocon, Weston and BPL have begun work on the rural model. Basu has set a target of 10 million Krishak sets by 2000.

Though there are 50 million TV sets in the country, 30 to 35 million are in the cities. About 2 million colour TV sets are produced annually as against 14 million by China. A quick study revealed that the Chinese TV was far cheaper than the Indian ones—just Rs 7,000.

Since price is the main reason for the slow offtake of the colour sets, industry has been coaxed to manufacture cheaper, tougher TV sets for those who cannot afford the more sophisticated ones.

In return DOE has promised various tax concessions for manufacture of these sets. With a bigger market and some tax incentives, DOE is confident even Krishak will bring in

money for the manufacturers.

So far the rural poor had to be satisfied with the black and white sets that cost just Rs 1,200.

A two-pronged approach has been adopted by DOE. The Krishak sets, as Basu calls them, will be based on new technology suitable for rural areas. Like the Maruti car which can be repaired by replacement of parts, TV manufacturers are identifying components that break down due to power fluctuation and can be replaced.

Simultaneously, field maintenance offices are proposed. In Madhya Pradesh, Basu says, electronic maintenance centres are run by NGOs. They also train local girls and boys in servicing everything from pump sets, hand pumps to TV sets. Such centres are to be replicated all over the country. Qualified maintenance staff can get accreditation certificates from DOE.

DD shows no regrets for visual goof-up

by Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, May 23: While broadcasting the news of the killing of seven soldiers and two civilians by the LTTE in Sri Lanka on the national channel last Sunday night, Doordarshan showed a visual of the Indian Army (a sardarji could be seen in a corner of the shot), says Suhas Borker, an independent film producer and member of the Citizen's Initiative for Radio and TV Autonomy.

Borker immediately rang up Doordarshan newsroom to get the mistake rectified or an apology rendered but was unable to get through to Shakuntala Mahawal, who heads the news unit, the editor of the programme, Biswajit Bhattacharya or producer Tara. Borker is now taking up the issue with the D-G, Doordarshan.

If an independent news producer had made such an error, Doordarshan would have descended on him like a ton of bricks, says Borker. But when DD blunders no one is willing to take the responsibility, he maintains. When BBC mixed up the footage of war-torn Chechnya with the Charar-e-Sharif shrine incidents in Kashmir Valley in May last year, the Indian government was extremely critical and BBC had to apologise.

But in a similar mix-up by Doordarshan no one is even willing to listen. Borker says the visual that was shown with the Sri Lankan news was probably meant to highlight the earlier news clip of escalation of ethnic violence in Assam's Kokrajhar district and search for bodies of victims by the police and para-military forces.

Normally the footage of Sri Lankan news is released by the Ministry of Defence and the credit MOD is given at one corner of the visual. But the clip showing the Indian soldiers had no such credit.

The mix-up of footage occurred only in the English news, not in the Hindi news, says Borker who is working on a project to monitor DD news.

DD International channel

Trial run for 6 months planned

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Sept. 20 After a meeting of the Committee of Secretaries last week, the Government has decided on a trial run for six months of a repackaged DD International. Foreign broadcasters and cable operators can pick up the signal and distribute it virtually free of cost for these six months.

Information and Broadcasting Secretary N. P. Nawani said he did not agree with the views of his predecessor S. Gopalan that DD International should be closed down for want of funds. He put up a stout defence for the international channel pointing out that it was a channel for the country per se and not just another Doordarshan channel.

"Personally, I don't want to wind up the channel so fast", Mr Nawani said, adding that "larger national interests are involved and we are committed to pay Rs 10 crore annually for the transponder on Panam Sat-4."

The Ministries of External Affairs and Commerce and the Department of Tourism and Culture are expected to provide inputs for the channel. Countering Pakistan propaganda against India was considered an important item on the agenda of the international channel.

However, no special funds are being provided to make the channel viable by enriching its contents.

As part of its drive to give visibility to the channel abroad, for six months the DD International signal can be down linked and picked up by anyone with a no objection certificate from Doordarshan and an access fee of \$ 100 a month.

If cable operators are able to penetrate a large number of homes, the revenue sharing will be worked out six months hence. Though Mr Nawani's plea for Rs 10 to Rs 12 crore for software has been rejected, the committee has agreed to review the situation should the channel gain acceptance abroad.

The channel itself will now be operational for 16 hours with a package of eight-hour programming being repeated. The help of the Department of Culture is being sought for the new package of programmes.

The cost of DD International was estimated at Rs 288 crore, but the former DG, Mr R. Basu, had not got the requisite clearance for such heavy financial commitment from the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs, Mr Nawani said. Permission of the Planning Commission was also not sought.

Though Mr Nawani was Additional Secretary (Financial) at that time, he said the DG, Doordarshan, had the autonomy to take decision for all projects up to Rs 5 crore. Only for Rs 50 crore and above is the clearance of CCEA required. Though the Secretaries expressed concern at DD Interna-

tional going ahead without the requisite sanctions, it is not being held against Mr Basu.

Meanwhile, the Damocles sword that was hanging over DD-3, the highly publicised channel for select, serious viewers, launched last year, has been withdrawn. It is being repackaged as a full fledged, multi-purpose channel showing sports, films and educational programmes.

Mr Nawani said the channel will now be operational from early morning to well after midnight. The first five hours will be devoted to programmes on education, farming and rural issues. The channel will be leased out to the Ministries handling these subjects on payment of a concessional telecast fee.

The Movie Club, currently on Panam Sat 4, is being shifted to the repackaged DD-3. Three movies will be shown on DD-3 — two between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. and one after 10.30 p.m.

In fact, Doordarshan is now trying to honour its commitment to promote sports, education etc. through DD-3. The sports hours will be 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. The evening hours and prime time will be devoted to infotainment.

Without funds, currently old programmes are being repeated on DD-3. Now, with the least expenditure, good telefilms will be shown as infotainment, Mr Nawani said.

Unlike DD International there will be no trial run for DD-3. It is here to stay in its new multi-purpose incarnation.

Vacancy at top may push DD to the bottom

by Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Sept 23: Who will be the new Director-generals of Doordarshan and All India Radio? Mr Shashi Kapoor, head of AIR retires at the end of next month and the D-G of Doordarshan, Mr R. Basu, is to be elevated to the rank of secretary shortly. He may, however, stay on as special secretary — taking over from Mr Bhasker Ghose when he retires at the end of February.

In fact in the next six to eight months several senior officers at AIR, DD and the Ministry will

retire leaving a kind of vacuum which has to be filled in either by the comparatively junior DDGs or by rank outsiders with little experience in handling media, culture and allied subjects.

In the Ministry joint secretaries Ms S. Gokhale and Mr N. Chawla dealing with films and broadcasting have left and a new joint secretary, Mr Madhavan, has been appointed. Ms Jai Chandiram, handling DD 3 retires at the end of the year. DDGs N. Sikdar and M. P. Lele retire later next year.

With Doordarshan and even AIR now facing more competi-

tion from private satellite channels and FM radio stations it is vital to get officers who are dynamic and not overawed by the reputation of BBC or the business acumen of a Rupert Murdoch or our home grown business tycoons trying to muscle in. The challenge is more for TV than radio which has quietly kept pace with the times.

In fact the current team in the Ministry, Doordarshan and AIR has been so busy fire-fighting — taking on new challenges to their suzerainty from the open skies and the groundswell of cable networks that there has been

little thought given to a long-term policy for the national broadcaster or for preparing a second line of command. Transmitters have multiplied and new stations set up but there has been no effort to get the required staff to man them.

The number of channels being operated by DD has increased dramatically in the last three years. It is operating a dozen regional channels, in addition to DD-1, 2 and 3 and is now poised to launch its international channel on Panam Sat 4. But there is dearth of the requisite software and though DD came into

existence as a public service broadcaster it is now seen primarily as an entertainment network. News coverage is still poor and disgruntled correspondents have left in droves. Though private news producers have brought some respectability to DD, its own coverage is still marred by mug shots of ministers and their ribbon cutting ceremonies.

In terms of the fast pace of growth and competition, the situation in DD in particular is grim. Mr Basu has been the prime mover and shaker. Since other

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Vacancy at top may push DD to bottom

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staff members have either not been taken into confidence or shown the necessary initiative to find out long term plans and strategy there could be chaos which would effect DD's position as number one in the current war of the channels. Competent people like Ms Bimla Bhalla, Ms Urmilla Gupta and Mr R. K. Singh fell foul of the former I&B Minister and left or were eased out.

A tug of war is expected between the Indian Information Service and the Indian Broadcasting

(Programme) Service for the top slot. All those of the rank of ADG within the organisation are eligible for the post. But composite selection for the post of D-G, a process which has which has already been set in motion, also makes eligible all class officers waiting to be made additional secretaries.

A list of candidates is prepared by the department of personnel and sent to the Information and Broadcasting Ministry which may then add more names before sending it to the UPSC

for final selection.

Though DDGs have been brought on par with ADGs, none of them may qualify for according to the rules they should have served at least three years as ADGs. In fact after Mr Shiv Sharma retired three DDGs had gone to CAT pleading that qualification should be waived in their favour since they belonged to the Indian Broadcasting (Programme) Service.

The Ministry had represented against their demand.

In the Indian Information Service too there are several contenders —Mr D. C. Bhowmik, D-G News-AIR, Mr Harish Avasthi of DD, Dr O. P. Kejriwal, director of Publications Division and Mrs N. J. Krishnan. Some engineers too qualify and have experience having served as station directors.

The U. C. Agarwal Committee report that the top seniormost jobs of D-G AIR and DD should be shared by the Information and Broadcasting Services has been gathering dust.

DD develops cold feet on marketing agents

by Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Sept 25

THE Ministry of Information and Broadcasting eager to appoint private agents for marketing commercial time on Doordarshan, has decided to go slow till it is fully assured that the policy would not lead to the backdoor entry of business houses.

What seems to have given cold feet to the Ministry is the power and reach of the bidders and the whispering campaign that

Doordarshan was up for sale. The rumours persisted despite the clarification from the D-G that marketing agents would not have any say either in the programming or Doordarshan's control over it.

Pooling in marketing, production and business skills, 12 conglomerates had made their bids and made technical presentations. In the race to get a toehold into Doordarshan were big players like Reliance, Hindustan Lever, UTV (in which Rupert Murdoch has a stake), the Amitabh Bachchan Corporation

Ltd, Lalit Modi's Bonavista and several advertising companies like Rediffusion, Ogilvy & Mather, Creative Eye with Madison Advertising, Lintas as well as Bollywood's, Subhash Ghai and B.R. Chopra and newspaper houses like Bennet Coleman and Indian Express.

The Committee that was to process the bids comprised comparatively junior officers of the I&B Ministry, Doordarshan and the Law Ministry and was headed by joint secretary I&B Naveen Chawla. Both I&B

Secretary B. Ghose and D-G Doordarshan R. Basu steered clear of the Committee. Now even Mr Chawla has gone abroad on study leave for a year. However, technical clearance seems to have been worked out.

The Ministry has decided to keep the marketing project on hold till it consults more experts and old I&B hands. Converting an inch into a mile is the forte of big business houses and with Mr Ghose retiring at the end of February and a question mark over the continuance of the

doughty Mr Basu in Doordarshan, the Ministry wants to be doubly sure that marketing agents do not muscle into the national broadcaster.

However, in the increasingly competitive world of television, a major drawback of DD with its multiple channels is marketing. In the current financial year, it hopes to rake in Rs 500 crore and was quite willing to allow marketing agents earn their share of commissions. But the great interest shown by the big bidders has become suspect.

Idiot box leaves many bleary-eyed

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Sept. 25

Television is changing people's lives quite dramatically. They are sleeping less, reading less, communicating less with their families. A tenth of those glued to TV sets have admitted that the care of children and the elderly is getting neglected.

These startling facts have been revealed in a countrywide study on the social impact of television by the Centre for Media Studies. A fifth of cable viewers and 14 per cent of Doordarshan viewers are sleeping less, says Dr Bhaskara Rao, chairman of CMS. In fact, a third of the TV addicts have adjusted their sleep timing to suit television viewing.

The study, done for the Information and Broadcasting Ministry, and covering metro cities, medium and small towns and rural areas shows that society is adjusting everything to suit television viewing. This is evidence enough of TV's widespread influence on society.

While television has done a great deal to create a positive awareness of sports and contributed to the popularity of sports and sports stars, ironically enough children have reported that they play less because they are so busy watching tournaments,



games and their sports idols.

While increasing the general knowledge of children, in particular their knowledge of the various products being advertised, the survey shows that hardly any children are watching educational programmes. Two-thirds of the children said they never watch such programmes. There was a sense of disappointment among the youth that TV and in particular cable TV, does not provide career guidance.

A third of the parents interviewed said their children's studies were affected because of the magnetic draw of television. Many parents had cut off cable TV to reduce the distraction for the children.

Not only were children

not doing their home work but they were playing less.

"Thanks to television "the distinction between fiction and reality is getting blurred—especially for children," says Mr Rao.

Despite the large base of viewership for DD news, viewers consider it to be selective, biased in favour of the Government and lacking in visuals. In contrast, BBC's news coverage is perceived to be immediate, unbiased and accompanied by vivid visuals. Programmes of general information like Parakh, Eye Witness, News Track and World This Week were also appreciated for their range of information and good presentation.

Seventy per cent of DD viewers

and 61 per cent of cable TV watchers said they never or hardly ever watch the news bulletins. Despite the modest viewership for news, two-thirds of the viewers confirmed that TV had created awareness of political events.

The study shows that TV has had a great influence on the media reading habits of people. However, the biggest casualty is radio. Reading of books (including novels), magazines and daily newspapers (in that order) has declined. While readership of newspapers per se may not have declined, the study shows that time devoted to reading has declined due to pre-occupation with TV.

The study refers to television as the double-edged weapon. Awareness about social and cultural issues was shot up. So has their understanding of history. Thanks to DD, two-thirds of the respondents expressed a sense of pride in being Indian.

There is unabashed support of the majority of viewers for TV's positive influence in bringing the world closer, promoting economic growth and healthy competition. Thanks to TV there is greater consciousness of health and fitness. However, there is indignation among the middle aged and the elderly for TV's role in promoting vulgarity in public life, violence in society, eve-teasing and aggression in every day life.

Doordarshan plays PMO music to 'market' Rao

by Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Sept 30
ELECTIONS MAY BE
SIX months away but the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has launched a major drive to promote Mr Narasimha Rao on what Information and Broadcasting Minister P.A. Sangma referred to as the "mouthpiece" of the Government - Doordarshan. In fact, the Prime Minister is being "marketed" like a brand.

The 'In Focus' with a 10-minute slot (between 8.20 pm and 8.30 pm) has been grabbed four days a week on DD-1 for projecting Mr Rao, his schemes and reforms. The programmes are made with the help of some of the

country's top producers, directors and cameramen, and Doordarshan blindly plays the recorded tapes submitted to it by the PMO.

In fact, from 7.00 pm itself, snippets of two to five minutes duration projecting the Prime Minister as the saviour of the nation, are cleverly interspersed between programmes. The theme song of *Roza*, the popular Mani Ratnam film, has been exploited to the hilt to project the Government and Mr Rao *per se*. So, *Roza's* "dil hai chota sa, choti si aasha" becomes "sab ki aasha, sab ke sapne ka dhyan rakkha, sab ka jeevan aasan rakkha". The great dream merchant is none other than Mr Rao.

Never before has Doordarshan been exploited in this manner for blatant propaganda of the Prime Minister. Though Simi Grewal made a film eulogising Rajiv Gandhi, it could be shown just once and it was over. But the current propaganda blitz is endless. It started a month and half ago with the PMO spearheading the production and paying for it. And it is Mr Bhuvanesh Chaturvedi, Mr P.V.R.K. Prasad, Mr S. Narendra and Mr B.S. Chauhan at the PMO who are responsible for the image-building exercise of the PM.

It is not quite clear if the films are being assembled in Delhi, Hyderabad or Bombay. It is quite likely that they are being put

together in all these three centres, for, who would not like to oblige the PMO. Among the producers are Mani Shankar, Satya Prakash and even UTV and Amit Khanna's Plus Channel for the fillers. The cameraman is A.K. Bir, said to be one of the best in his line. The music composer is Kreem.

Though no one can deny the propaganda angle of the fillers, there has been variety. *Suraj ki aur char kadam* was another cleverly done film on the four years of the Prime Minister. A few months ago, it was Bollywood's Mahesh Bhatt who directed the PM's *Mujhe kutch kahna hai*, with Mr Rao explaining or reporting the

Government's policies to the people.

The productions show a blend of advertising techniques to market a product with the music/masala mix in Bollywood style. So, there may be a song sequence, followed by someone talking from a telephone booth, with a picture of Mr Narsimha Rao stuck on the roof of the booth. Or, it may be more explicit. As the last notes of a song fade away, the camera pans over a bustling crowd with a picture of the PM superimposed. Though the Congress legacy has been projected in Rajiv Gandhi and Mrs Indira Gandhi, the domineering personality is Mr Narasimha Rao.

Sangma proposes special unit for pre-poll publicity campaign

by Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Oct 5: A special campaign unit has been proposed by the Information and Broadcasting Minister, Mr P.A. Sangma, with an eye on the elections. All units of the I&B Ministry are being roped in for a publicity blitz on the achievements of the Government.

The multi-media campaign by different media units of the Ministry during the coming months was discussed yesterday with senior officers of the Ministry.

This morning there was a circular on the desk of most information officers of the Press Information Bureau that they will have to give priority to 10 specific areas so that the campaign does not get diffused. The focus is not to be on the foreign exchange reserves going up or the number of joint venture projects.

Instead, priority areas are the schemes of the departments of rural development and rural areas and employment; social se-

curity schemes of the Finance Ministry; schemes of the Labour Ministry; schemes of the Ministry of Welfare relating to SCs, STs, OBCs, minorities and other weaker sections; schemes of urban employment of the department of Urban Affairs and Employment; schemes of the Ministry of Health relating to the Indian systems of medicine; Mid-day meals scheme of the Department of Education; schemes of the Department of Women and Child Development including Mahila Samridhi Yojana.

The Minister is keen to beat the drum on the Government efforts for employment generation. The note issued by the I&B joint secretary, Mr Raghu Menon, says "information for the preparation of appropriate software would have to be obtained from the Planning Commission and the Ministry of Labour."

With women forming 50 per cent of the electorate, the Ministry would like special software highlighting the election of

women in rural and urban local bodies like panchayats, corporations etc.

Mr Sangma will also be meeting the secretaries of the departments whose schemes have to be highlighted to tap them for resources for the multi-media campaigns.

Media units have been asked to seek the assistance of non-governmental agencies to enhance the quality of the software. This is already being done by the Prime Minister's Office to prepare software on the PM for Doordarshan.

Mr Sangma has no qualms about turning not just Doordarshan and All India Radio but the entire I&B Ministry into the mouthpiece of the Government. The thrust of the campaigns, he has said, is to provide information on all these schemes to the people at large but in particular to those who are either unaware or have not been able to take advantage of the benefits provided by these schemes.

No money in DD's kitty for software

by Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Oct 14: Left with barely Rs 9 crore of its 1995-96 budget for software, Doordarshan is in serious trouble. Unbridled ambition has made the national broadcaster launch 19 channels – many of them regional channels – and its 20th channel on Panam Sat-4 is due to start any day now. But there is no money in the kitty for software which is the life and blood of any good channel.

Since April no new serials have been commissioned. But there is not even money to pay for the ones already commissioned. Private producers are in a quandary. They cannot afford to annoy Doordarshan by protesting loudly about non-payment and the small amounts given to appease them are inadequate to produce the next round of episodes.

The Information and Broadcasting Ministry has approached the Finance Ministry to bail it out of its embarrassing predicament. It has sought about Rs 40 crore to see it through this financial year which is more than the Rs 36 crore that the Planning Commission allocated for software in the current financial year.

In fact the Ministry had asked for Rs 700 crore of which Rs 120

crore was to have been spent on software. But it received just a little over Rs 300 crore including Rs 36 crore for software.

Though Doordarshan has been raking in money – this year it is expected to earn over Rs 550 crore in commercial time – it is not allowed to touch the money which goes into the national exchequer.

The fund crisis is forcing DD to slow down. So though Channel-3, the elite channel has been launched to improve DD's image, it is on for just five hours every evening. The programmes on this channel are supposed to be largely commissioned and Doordarshan would require at least Rs 100 crore for this channel alone.

Having launched its premium channel its growth has to be sustained. From November, Doordarshan hopes to have eight hours of programming on this channel. But instead of commissioning programmes it is now buying them from BBC and others. The cheapest commissioned programme in India would cost Rs 2 lakh while the royalty on a sourced foreign programme would be Rs 45,000 (\$ 1500). Doordarshan's programmes on the stock market may also be shown on this channel. But this would amount to diluting the quality of the channel.

News on DD takes a break for Diwali

by Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Oct 20: The two popular news and current affairs programmes of Doordarshan - NDTV's *Tonight* and News Track's *Aaj Tak* have decided to take a Diwali break.

Even the mandarins of Mandi House have not been able to persuade them to come on air because news does not cease on Diwali or on the following Vishwakarma Day when tools of work are worshipped.

So it is going to be a long weekend for the two news networks. Both programmes run for five days a week and take a break on Saturday and Sunday. Now they will have a holiday on Monday and Tuesday too.

The D-G, Doordarshan, Mr R. Basu's efforts to do some arm-twisting have failed. There is competition between the two networks and when NDTV wanted to take off for two days, the slot was offered to News Track for its Hindi bulletin. But it, too, was not interested.

Mr Prannoy Roy of NDTV pointed out that Christmas and Boxer's Day were holidays in En-

gland even for news networks. In any case, for eight years he and his team had taken leave on Diwali and Vishwakarma Day.

Doordarshan's unsung news team, however, will continue to hold the fort. On some Sunday they have even put out 15 news bulletins, a Doordarshan official stated.

While NDTV and News Track take a rather long break, Business India TV today suddenly dropped two of its news bulletins. There will only be the evening broadcast of *News Night* from today.

The scaling down of its news programmes has added fuel to the speculation about BITV's financial troubles. Earlier, BITV had stopped commissioning new serials.

However, Ms Mala Thapar of BITV maintained that the decision to drop two news bulletins was part of a larger strategy to revamp news and give it a new direction.

While *News Night* will continue to be bilingual - Hindi and English - the earlier bulletins may be in just one regional language.

The earlier bulletins were experimental. The audience in the south is not bilingual, she stated.

She said there were also plans afoot to bifurcate programming to two distinct channels for news and entertainment. Currently BITV has just one channel.

On the reasons for not commissioning fresh serials, she said the prime time between 6.30 pm and 9.30 pm was packed with programmes and there was no scope for new serials.

However, several producers have complained that they have not been paid and the cheques given have bounced.

Ms Thapar, however, maintained that not a single cheque she had issued had bounced.

Mr A.N. Sen, also of BITV, however, said the two bulletins were stopped because they were assessing the programmes and fund allocation. He indirectly admitted to the financial squeeze when he said Rs 1 crore-a-month was being given to the VSNL for transmission and the company had to decide whether to pay transmission fees or buy cameras and much-needed hardware.

Doordarshan chief gets sixth extension

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Oct. 29

With the setting up of the Prasar Bharati Corporation getting delayed, the D-G of Doordarshan, Mr K. S. Sarma, whose tenure ends at the end of this month, is being asked to stay on and ensure a smooth transition of Doordarshan to the autonomous body. This is Mr Sarma's sixth extension.

The new structure is not likely to be in place till next March though the Cabinet last week approved the amendments to the Prasar Bharati Act. This means that Mr Sarma will also stay as head of the national broadcaster. Meanwhile, Mr Sarma and the 1968 batch of the IAS are being considered for the additional secretary posts.

It will be up to the selection committee of the Prasar Bharati Corporation to decide if it wants to retain the services of Mr Sarma as CEO of the corporation.

Things have been moving so slowly on the Prasar Bharati Corporation front that even the name of the third member of the committee that will select the chairman of the corporation, the CEO and the six part-time members has not yet been announced. As per the Act, the Vice-President and the

Broadcasting Bill likely to be delayed

DIFFERENCES within the Congress on the foreign equity that should be permitted in the Broadcasting Bill are likely to further delay its introduction in Parliament.

The Bill, which will be the basis for setting up the Broadcasting Authority of India, was to be introduced next month in the winter session of Parliament. But while Mr Sharad Pawar, chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Broadcasting, favours over 49 per cent foreign equity, Mr Vijay Bhaskar Reddy and Mr V. N. Gadgil want to bring down the foreign equity component.

The Congress stand on this crucial issue of the Broadcasting Bill has to be resolved by Congress president Sitaram Kesri. The BJP had pitched for 25 per cent foreign equity in its presentation to the Parliamentary Committee.

chairman of the Press Council are on the selection committee. The

third person is to be a nominee of the President.

To make the selection committee more independent in the eyes of the public, Justice Sawant of the Press Council has suggested that as in the selection of the Press Council chairman, the third selector could be the Speaker of the Lok Sabha. However, there has been no response to Justice Sawant's suggestion.

Meanwhile, there is much speculation over whether the third member of the selection committee will be Mr Pai Panandikar of the Centre for Police Research or Mr Jeevan Reddy. Several names are also being floated for the post of chairman of the corporation and the CEO. A strong contender for the chairman's post is said to be Mr Abid Husain, former Indian ambassador to the US and a member of the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation. Names of former I&B secretaries are also doing the rounds for the post of CEO.

The amendments to the 1990 Act, that have been pushed through, include deletion of parliamentary committee to oversee the Prasar Bharati Corporation. Since there is already a Parliamentary Standing Committee for the I&B Ministry, there is no need for another one.

A Broadcasting Council to en-

sure standards was proposed in the 1990 Act. Since this work will be done by the Broadcasting Authority, which is also waiting the go-ahead from the Parliamentary Committee on Broadcasting, the proposal for a council has been dropped. The technical hitches in providing a choice to the employees to work with the new autonomous corporation or move out have been removed.

Of the 45,000 staff employed by AIR and Doordarshan (25,000 and 20,000, respectively), 44,600 are regular employees of these two cadres. Only a miniscule 400 belong to other cadres like the Information Service, Audit Service and even the IAS.

It is learnt that 99 per cent of the staff want to stay on with the corporation — in fact, they have no option. Those who want to move out of broadcasting are transferred to the surplus cell where they can stay for not more than six months. If they are not absorbed by some other department by then they could lose their cushy Government jobs.

So its business as usual in Doordarshan with vacancies of cameramen and producers being filled and new programmes commissioned. Only the future of the corporation is still shrouded in a haze.

Sweeping changes proposed in Broadcasting Bill

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Oct. 31

Under the proposed Broadcasting Bill to be introduced in the winter session of Parliament no radio or television service can operate without a licence from the Indian Broadcasting Authority.

Excluded from holding a licence under the proposed law are foreign nationals, companies not incorporated in India, those incorporated in India but with foreign equity exceeding 25 per cent, partnership firms where all partners are not Indians, religious bodies and their associates, Governments and local authorities, advertising agencies and public-funded bodies.

After the two-day marathon meeting of Information and Broadcasting Ministers, secretaries and directors of cinematography the long-awaited Broadcasting Bill has finally been worked out in detail. It is the direct outcome of the Supreme Court judgment of February last year which said that airwaves are public property and a monopoly over broadcasting by Government or anybody else is inconsistent with the right to free speech. The court had directed the setting up of an independent autonomous public authority to regulate the use of airwaves.

The existing cross media restriction of UK and other countries has been incorporated in the proposed

Bill. It is clearly stated that the owner or proprietor of the national or local newspaper or any other person having more than 20 per cent share holding in such ventures will not be permitted to hold a licence for any TV or radio service or vice versa.

The background paper for discussion on the Broadcasting Bill, circulated at the Information Ministers' conference states: "One of the serious pitfalls of private broadcasting is that it might facilitate growth of powerful media magnates who will develop a monopoly and will be in a position to influence the news and views in general. This danger has to be safeguarded at all costs. One way out would be to fix capping on number of licences a person can hold."

The I&B Ministry's brief to Cabinet clearly spells out restrictions on holding and accumulation of licences. So a person holding a licence in one category will not be given licence in another category and capping the maximum number of licences in each category has been worked out.

So local radio and terrestrial broadcaster can hold 20 licences; local TV, terrestrial broadcaster 10 licences; the regional, terrestrial radio broadcaster 5 and regional TV, terrestrial broadcaster 2. However not more than one licence can be held by a national TV or radio terrestrial broadcaster and domestic satellite TV broad-

caster.

The licences cannot be transferred and the period of each licence will be fixed by the Broadcasting Authority in such a way that the licensee can recover his investment in the period the licence is allotted. But in no case should the licence be for more than 10 years.

The Broadcast law envisaged by the Ministry will encompass all aspects of radio and TV broadcasting terrestrial, satellite, direct to home and local delivery services (cable TV including multi-channel micro wave distribution system).

The proposed Broadcasting Authority will have a full time chairman and four full-time members appointed by the President on recommendations of the selection committee. The chairman will be someone with a background in management, broadcasting, programming, engineering and communication. The Authority will have six part-time members drawn largely from the cultural sector.

It will be the responsibility of the Broadcasting Authority to ensure that the licensees do not broadcast/telecast anything that is indecent, hurts religious sentiments or is likely to incite crime or lead to disorder. It will ensure that news is accurate and impartial in matters of political or industrial controversies or relating to current public policy.

The Authority is expected to prescribe advertising codes, standards and undertake a review of

the programmes from time to time. It will also fix a minimum time that all licensees will allot for public service broadcasting including programmes on education, development or for children.

The Authority will also receive and deal with complaints from the public about violation of the Broadcasting Act.

Dr Bhaskar Rao, founder and chairman of the Centre for Media Studies and a member of the Independent Initiative on public service broadcasting, was disappointed that the proposed Bill does not provide for a Complaint Council under the Broadcasting Authority. Similar State-level councils, he said, were vital for redressal of public grievances.

Dr Rao was disappointed that NGOs and civic authorities had been denied a licence to run a radio or television service. The licence given to a channel or broadcaster should be reviewed not after 10 years, as provided in the Bill, but after four or five years, he said. He was also disappointed that the Bill ignores the academic community completely. There is no effort to converge academics and technology and no provision has been made to include an academician on the board of the Broadcasting Authority.

The media expert feels an independent annual review of each of the broadcasters should be made obligatory.

Top DD engineers joining exodus

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Nov. 2

While Doordarshan flounders along experimenting with channels and antagonising private producers and inhouse talent, DD's brightest and best are leaving in droves to join foreign channels and Star TV in particular.

Earlier it was bureaucrats, production staff and information officers who were abandoning what they called the "sinking ship." While "the not-so-filthy lucre of the foreign networks was a major attraction, it was also the opportunity to win laurels and grow again in the media boom," says a young programme executive who does not wish to be disloyal to the national broadcaster.

Now engineers too are joining the exodus. Mr Sitaram, who was looking after DD International till he was posted to Bhopal and subsequently Guwahati, has put in his papers to work for his former boss, Mr R. Basu of Star TV. Mr Sitaram was earlier the technical adviser to the former DG and

obviously had a good equation with him. Mr Sitaram has followed in the footsteps of former DD engineer Jawahar who for over a year now has been chief engineer of New Delhi Television.

If R. Basu was the first secretary to Government to quit, additional secretary in the Cabinet Secretariat, Ms Bimla Bhalla, has been quick to follow his example. Ms Bhalla, who belongs to the Information Service and almost became DG Doordarshan in Mr K. P. Singh Deo's tenure, says she has still to decide where she will join. There is a good chance that she will join the Star network.

Urmila Gupta, Indira Mansingh and Naazish Hussaini, at one stage known as the blue eyed bevy of Doordarshan, are also said to be Starward bound. However, no one is willing to let on as yet where exactly they will be joining. "We have several offers which we will consider after our notice period is over," is the standard reply. DTH service Ms Mansingh will continue to breathe down the back of NDTV — monitoring the news programmes.

Mr V. Basavraj, former Controller of Programmes at DD, has already joined Star and his creditline was evident at last Sunday's 'count down' programme produced by former Zee employee Karuna Samthani. Producer Suman Bajaj resigned six months ago and deputy controller of programmes, Ms Bani Ghose, is also said to be on her way out. Though it is not quite where they may be headed, those with potential can no longer stomach the stagnation in DD.

The DDG (finance), Mr Ashok Mansukhani, has also resigned from the Government. Hinduja's Siti Cables as well as multinationals like CNN, Reuter, Discovery, Sony are looking for experienced hands while DD is giving them the short shrift.

Former DD-3 head Jai Chandiram is now working with the Open University but could be grabbed by Star or Discovery. In fact the first DD bureaucrat (an IAS officer at that) to quit the Government was Mr R. K. Singh who now heads the sports channel ESPN's India operations. Mr

Ashok Ogra, another bright officer from the programme staff with a good business head, joined Discovery Channel a few months ago. There is talk of his now gravitating to Star to work with Mr Basu.

A lot of the people who are leaving the national broadcaster were identified with the former regime of Mr Basu and Mr Bhaskar Ghose and were shifted around or dumped. Ms Hussaini, for example, was asked to look after the archives and has chosen to leave an organisation that she has worked with for 20 years.

Recently 14 video executives were made controller of programme (CPs) and this has upset the DCPs who were eagerly awaiting their promotion.

The Information and Broadcasting Ministry failed to anticipate the big boom in the television industry and keep pace with its demands. The two institutes for training people for the film and TV industry, the Film Institute in Pune and Jamia Millia in Delhi, admit 40 students a year each.

Pawar sore over ordinance on broadcasting

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Nov. 10

Mr Sharad Pawar, chairman of the joint Parliamentary Committee on Broadcasting, has asked Prime Minister I. K. Gujral if there is any rethinking on the Broadcasting Authority of India. "If there is, please let me know."

Mr Pawar is miffed at the manner in which the Government has pushed through the ordinance on amendments to the Prasar Bharati without waiting for the Broadcasting Authority of India to be set. In fact the Parliamentary Committee on Broadcasting was not even consulted on the issue.

Mr Pawar, who dashed down to Delhi on Saturday for a few hours, has written to Mr Gujral and pointed out that the broadcasting authority was to have been the umbrella regulatory authority. With the issue of an ordinance, the public sector broadcaster has now tried to steer away from its authority.

The issue of whether the largest broadcaster could be excluded from the regulatory framework merely because it was a statutory body funded by the Government was still under the consideration of the committee, he has said.

Mr Pawar feels there should be a single programming and advertising code for the country, which should be decided by the Broadcasting Authority of India. But by having a separate code for Prasar Bharati which is watched by 80 per cent of the public, two parallel systems were being set up in the same industry.

Mr Pawar has pointed out that the purpose of the Broadcasting Bill is to have an umbrella regulatory framework for broadcasting in the country. If the Prasar Bharati was kept out of the licensing purview of the broadcasting authority, it would have scant respect for it, he has pointed out.

The Government will have to resolve the relationship between the Prasar Bharati Corporation and the Broadcasting Authority of India and it would have been easier to work it out on the basis of the report of the Parliamentary committee.

The Parliamentary committee is meeting on Nov. 17 and 18 to finalise its report on the Broadcasting Bill. But it may ultimately be reduced to a bill that will regulate just a handful of private channels.

Second thoughts on Measat-DD

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Nov. 13

There is a second thought in the Information and Broadcasting Ministry over the setting up of the joint venture company of Measat Broadcast Systems of Malaysia and Doordarshan for a DTH (direct to home) service.

The MoU for the project was signed with considerable hype in the presence of former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao when he visited Kuala Lumpur last year. In fact the MoU, which had a life of a year, has lapsed and now Cabinet approval is being sought to extend the MoU by another year.

Backtracking on an MoU signed on a Prime Ministerial visit should be embarrassing for a country and the Malaysians have made amply evident their anguish over the delay in the project. Though Measat Broadcast Systems is a private company with about 15 per cent government stake in it, it has considerable political clout. When External Affairs Minister I. K. Gujral was in Malaysia recently, the future of the joint venture company was raised.

At the recent G-15 meeting in Harare, Malaysian Prime Minister M. Mahathir spoke to Prime Minister Deve Gowda. In an indirect reference to the project, he said developed countries had a hold on information which puts de-

veloping countries at a disadvantage. To be on top of the situation, he said developing countries should have their own satellite.

The PMO's views on the subject have probably not been conveyed to the Information and Broadcasting Ministry for the present thinking in the Ministry is that the MoU was signed in great haste — with barely two days to look into the consequences of such an agreement. When private broadcasting is not allowed in the country how could the Government allow a private sector company to rule over the Indian skies, is one argument for shelving the project.

Another, that the financial implications of such a venture had not been worked out. The joint-venture company with India holding 51 per cent of the shares would have meant an investment of anything from Rs 1,500 crore to Rs 2,500 crore.

The Government also wants to test the strength of the signals from Measat 5 in the monsoon season. A senior official who did not wish to be quoted said "the loose ends are being tied up." Since the project was signed by the last Government, it would be better to have a fresh approval from this Government too — hence the need to refer it to Cabinet.

However, those associated with the project from the beginning maintain that though the initiative

for the project came from Malaysia, the Information and Broadcasting Ministry and Doordarshan saw in the DTH satellite venture, the future of broadcasting. Since advertising revenue is not likely to sustain broadcasting for too long, paid television of the DTH variety was seen as a good alternative. With a million subscribers paying anything from Rs 500 to Rs 1000 a month, the DTH would have generated its own resources.

The DTH also has a better reach than cable networks and offers a clearer image. Though the decision to tie up with Measat was taken in a hurry, it was not hare-brained as is being made out by people calling the shots today, the officials stated.

Further, Doordarshan was expected to exploit the immense potential of its library. Though the business plans were not worked out, there was some idea of the cost of such a project. Public money and financial institutes were to be tapped.

But the joint-venture was put into cold storage by bureaucrats unable or unwilling to take decisions on a growing Doordarshan. Now after Mr Mahathir's remarks in Harare and his visit to India later this year or early next year, the joint venture may just get a new lease of life.

DD's third channel arrives in hi-tech glitz

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Nov 14: Door-darshan put its best foot forward today with the launch of the much-touted DD-3 among a small but select gathering of media watchers and television personalities in five-star luxury. It was an upmarket evening.

An extremely well-produced video, which ran the gamut of the new channel's programmes, was reflected on giant screens on three walls of the large hall.

The event was so hi-tech that media critics waited with bated breath to see if DD floundered. And flounder it did. There were some tense moments as images on the screen would not synchronise with the commentary. But computers quickly corrected the fault.

In a brief speech, the Union Minister for Information and Broadcasting, Mr P.A. Sangma, assured the gathering that the new channel was not being mounted at the cost of DD-1, which he said would get top priority. DD-2 would complement the other two, he added.

The secretary, I&B Ministry, Mr Bhaskar Ghose, said that DD-3 would be an interactive channel and would evolve and change according to the needs of viewers.

Catering to the upper crust that spurns Zee and Metro's

daily dose of film-based entertainment, DD-3 offers a delectable fare of theatre and drama every Friday night.

Some of the titles to be shown are *Sakharam Binder* directed by Shyamanand Jalan; *Yayati* directed by B.V. Karanth; *Pita* and *Hamidabai ki Kotha* by Govind Nihalani; *Shakuntala*, *Rukmavati ki Haveli* and *Wada Chirai Bandi* directed by Vijaya Mehta; *Lights Out*, *Nati Binodini* and three other plays directed by Nissar Allana.

Theatre directors Alyque Padasee, Girish Karnad and B.V. Karanth are shown at work on Monday night. In the section on DD classics, *Fariyad* is a serial based on true case studies of women prisoners written by Tripurari Sharma and directed by Sudha Kiran; *Krishnakant ka Vasiyatnama* is a serial directed by Shyamanand Jalan.

Other well known plays under production are *Pagla Ghoda*, *Do Gaz Zameen*, *Ashad ka Ek Din* and *In Search of a Character*, a six-part series of famous characters and their interpretations by actors, actresses and theatre-persons.

In fact, there may be a surfeit of theatre. The programmes seem to have been inspired by Mr Bhaskar Ghose, who loves theatre and is an active member of Yatrik and other groups. Every Tuesday evening there will be a theatre quiz in the

channel.

Wildlife has been given pride of place in DD-3 with films by Naresh and Rajesh Bedi and Mike Pandey dominating this section. Environment documentaries and an environment quiz are also on the cards. On Sundays Hugh and Colleen Gantzer take tourists "off the beaten track."

The section on art features *Broad Canvas* - artists at work; art history by Ebrahim Alkazi titled *Indian Art and Modernism* and the *The Story of Indian Painting*.

The section on business and corporate affairs includes the *South Asia Report* by Asia Business News, a market roundup with details of analysis, a corporate quiz featuring business and management professionals. Also, *Management Perspectives* looks at the emerging business environment in India and features management gurus and top industrialists.

Chat shows include interviews with M.F. Husain, Adoor Gopalakrishnan, Richard Gere and Prof U.R. Ananthamurthy. *Speak Easy*, another chat show is hosted by Mallika Sarabhai.

It will be *World Cinema* every Wednesday and Sunday night. Among the films screened already are *The Last Emperor*, *Mephisto*, *Rudali* and *Suraj ka Satva Ghoda*.

Top soaps bag News Tonight-vacated slot

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Nov. 14

A popular serial that is expected to rake in revenue of Rs 35 to Rs 40 lakh a week will replace the English news bulletin of Prannoy Roy, News Tonight, on DD-2 that was bringing in just one-fifth the amount.

With Prannoy Roy moving his news bulletin to Star TV, at least half-a-dozen people were vying for the prime time news slot on the Metro channel. In the race were Dileep Padgaonkar's APCA, TV Today who wanted to do an English bulletin in addition to Aaj Tak, Pritish Nandy's PN Communications, Times TV, Ramesh Sharma and Uma Gajapathy Raju and Nalini Singh.

Since the Metro channel was basically conceived as an entertainment channel, the mandarins of Mandi House and Shastri Bhavan have decided to give the half hour between 9.30 p.m. and 10 p.m. and again between 10.30 p.m. and 11 p.m. to Hindi soaps that will have people glued to their TV sets as well as bring in the much needed cash for Doordarshan.

While the national channel is seen as the public broadcast wing of Doordarshan, the Metro is seen as the entertainment-cum-money spinner channel. It is time that the

Metro channel started making more money than the national channel, Information and Broadcasting Secretary N. P. Nawani stated.

So on Mondays, the Metro channel will host Hindustani by Cinevista, Tuesday — Padhosan by Jitendra, Wednesday — Samjhota by Bonavista and Thursday — Sea Horse by UTV. Doordarshan has not yet decided who will get the slot on Friday. While Padhosan and Samjhota have just begun broadcasting the others will follow suit.

The number of episodes per serial will be decided on the basis of their popularity. However, in addition to the 120 seconds of free commercial time, additional time is to be provided on the basis of revenue sharing with DD.

Mr Nawani said since there are inhouse news bulletins at 8.30 p.m. and 9 p.m. there was no need for an English news bulletin from a private producer on the channel. However, news headlines will be read out every two hours and later this may be increased to every hour. A 10 minutes current affairs programme has been proposed after the news by Aaj Tak but the details have yet to be worked out. Most metro stations delink for broadcasting their own news during that time.

Though Nalini Singh has not got the coveted English news slot, she is being given five minutes between 8.55 p.m. and 9 p.m. for Ankho Dekha — news from remote corners of the country. Mr Padgaonkar's consolation prize is a half hour slot for news from 7.30 p.m. to 8 p.m. on the revamped DD-3.

Prasar Bharati Board's first meet on Dec 10

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Dec. 3

The first meeting of the recently constituted Prasar Bharati Board will be held next Wednesday and high on its agenda is giving a distinct personality to each of the Doordarshan channels.

It's a 'khichdi' now with every channel having news, soaps, lots of entertainment and films galore from Bollywood, says Mr S. S. Gill, the former I&B Secretary and the new executive member of the Board. He ruled out the possibility of relaunching DD 3 as an elite channel but would like to move culture-related programmes to the metro channel. But whatever changes are made will come out of the collective decision of the Board, says the tough talking Gill, nicknamed the Ghengiz Khan of Doordarshan.

The Board will also be discussing improvement of DD's news bulletins so that they are able to

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Distinct personality for DD channels soon

Continued from page 1 col. 5

compete with news of private channels. The only good news programme on DD is by a private producer, says Mr Gill adding that he would like to improve the quality of the inhouse bulletins so that they are comparable with Aaj Tak.

Emphasis is being given to improving the visual content of news. In fact the director of the Patna Doordarshan has been pulled up for not rushing to Jehanabad and procuring footage of the carnage by the Ranveer Sena yesterday.

You can't afford to sleep over news, says Mr Gill. Brushing aside government bureaucracy which allows the lowly paid to travel only by train or bus, Mr Gill has said all news teams will have unlimited facility for air travel.

An independent News Division of Doordarshan is being set up with technical and engineering facilities attached to it. In fact it's a whirl of activities in the news division with cameras being updated and orders placed for the latest model of computers, graphic and editing machines. Earlier there was just one studio for news and it had to be shared with the Delhi Kendra. Now a larger studio and special sets for discussions are being prepared.

Though the accent is on inhouse

production, well known broadcast journalists like Prabhat Dabral, Uma Bhatnagar and Vinati Deepak — all three former DD reporters — are being asked to help out on assignment basis, says Mr Harish Awasti, head of the News Division. BBC professionals are to be roped in for training staff in scripting and packaging.

The poor reception quality of the DD channels is already being tackled. 'It is deliberate sabotage by private channels who have ganged up with cable operators,' says Mr Gill. While the private channels are projected through a dish and the reception is clear, DD channels are obtained terrestrially. Mr Gill has already summoned the cable operators and asked them to show the DD channels or — he will use the existing laws against the operators.

Currently 27 commercial films and seven religion-based serials are shown every week on Doordarshan. It is not our job to show Bollywood films, says the new executive member of the Prasar Bharati Board. These are to be drastically pruned and well known producers engaged to make tele films that families can sit together and watch.

Socially relevant programmes are to be given high priority on the public broadcasters. Vinod Dua,

Nalini Singh, Kamleshwar and Swami Agnivesh have already been commissioned to make them. Today not a single good producer is working for DD, he says.

The Administrative Staff College at Hyderabad has been asked to review the working of DD and AIR. In three or four months when its report is in, Mr Gill will crack the whip to modernise the national broadcasters and make them more dynamic. There are 19,000 on the rolls of Doordarshan and hardly any programmes are made inhouse. Instead of pushing files and papers, he now plans to motivate them to produce prog-

rammes.

In fact the efforts to instil discipline have already begun. Those who report late to work are being given a black mark, and if they continue to be late, salaries may be cut.

Worried about major international sports events being hijacked by private channels, Mr Gill plans to have a calendar of sports events over the next five years.

Unfazed by the uncertainty created by the Prasar Bharati Ordinance not being ratified by Parliament, Mr Gill says he accepted the present job because he loves the media.

Gill gets bit of talking-to

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Dec. 10
Though Mr S. S. Gill is executive member of the Prasar Bharati Board, the first meeting of the full Board, has decided that he will not be working alone. Various committees headed by members of the Board and other experts will be assisting Mr Gill.

In fact, the Committee, headed by Mr Nikhil Chakravarty, and with other eminent persons like Mr B. G. Verghese, Dr Abid Husain, Prof U. R. Rao, Prof Romila Thapar, former chief secretary of Tamil Nadu A. Padmanabhan and Hindi writer Rajendra Yadav, discussed Mr Gill's role in rushing to the media with his ideas for Doordarshan and All-India Radio and sought his explanation.

Mr Gill, however, mollified Board members by pointing out that he was handicapped by lack of full information on Prasar Bharati and its structure.

Though the deliberations today were of a general nature, the meet-

ing lasted the whole day. Tomorrow the discussion will continue on more concrete issues. The financial resources of the Board and how to raise adequate funds for Prasar Bharati so that it is truly autonomous are to be discussed.

There was a general discussion on the political status of the country and it was decided that DD and AIR should not only present the views of all parties but even the perceptions of people at the local level. All members had come prepared for the meeting. They had ideas and views on DD and AIR which they aired.

In a special communication to the Prasar Bharati Board at its first meeting today, Jan Prasar, a citizen's initiative for radio and television autonomy, has appealed to the Board to give the "people of India a public resource denied to them for the past 50 years."

Jan Prasar's convenor Suhas Borkar has said autonomy for the electronic media has to be safeguarded not only from political and bureaucratic control but also from subversion by commercial in-

terests. The commercial siege on broadcasting, which is already at its peak, needs to be lifted. He warns that the airwaves are being made a tool of a narrow affluent class, projecting their consumerism, decadent lifestyle and dreams.

Jan Prasar says commercial sponsorship should be delinked from programme content on Doordarshan and AIR. It says advertising, which mocks at the poor for their poverty and promotes false values should have no place on our network.

The electronic media, it says, has been opened by the government to crass commercialism and Bombay filmworld trivia further distorting Indian reality to serve a narrow, affluent class. Jan Prasar says a public resource built over decades cannot be mortgaged to subversive commercial interests and given a free reign to their mercenaries. The paradigm shift in the electronic media from a development model to an elitist, consumerist model has to be reversed, is Jan Prasar's fiat to the Board.

Senior DD newsreaders protest against 'autocracy'

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Dec. 27

As the CEO of Prasar Bharati, Mr S. S. Gill, and his aides in Doordarshan seek to revamp news, inject some fresh blood and in the process downgrade some senior newsreaders like Gitanjali Aiyar, Manjari Joshi, Kaveri Mukherji and Usha Albuquerque, a quiet battle against the new "autocracy" of Mandi House has broken out.

Trouble erupted soon after a list of 20 newsreaders (later another name was appended) was put up at a special meeting with the CEO. Manjari, Salma Sultan and Gitanjali were not called for the meeting. One of them in fact tried to speak to the new power hierarchy and was told she was not in the panel of newsreaders put together by DD's Harish Awasthi and film critic Amita Malik.

Kaveri Mukherji, who, along with two others, put in a complaint to the Chairman of the Prasar Bharati Board, Mr Nikhil Chakravarty, on Dec. 16, was in the list of 20 persons called for the Dec. 1 meeting. Ms Mukherji, who is in the forefront of the agitation, took up cudgels for colleagues who were not called for the meeting. Mr Gill quietly brushed aside any discussion on the issue by pointing out that Mandi House was not Parliament and the issue was not a debatable one.

Mr Gill is believed to have pointed out that the news on BBC, Star TV and even Home TV was better packaged than DD news and there were fresh, energetic faces. Even in the film industry, people stayed on the top only for four to five years. Mr Gill did not favour the long tenure of prime time newsreaders. A senior male newsreader pointed out that casual newsreaders were in full time jobs elsewhere and therefore could not

give the kind of time for Doordarshan that the CEO expected.

Some of those who have been knocked out or down graded by the new dispensation point out that they had received good grading in the September 1996 internal rating by Kamleshwar, J. Tuli, Devki Nandan Pandey, Pratima Puri and others. With the new enhanced pay packets of the autonomous corporation, the old grades were no longer valid, newsreaders were told. Even the newsreaders who had just recently been black-listed for participating in a programme organised by Zee TV were brought back to prime time news reading.

Mr Gill suggested that a core committee of newsreaders should get together and come out with their own report on how to improve news by Dec. 8. Neethi Ravindran, Tejeshwar Singh, J. V. Raman and Minu were appointed on the core committee. Their report, if one was prepared, has not reached Mr Gill.

In mid-December, Minu and Salma Sultan met Mr Gill on the issue and were told *aap logon ke chehre se log oob gaye hain*, (people are tired of watching you all). It was then pointed out that if Mr Gill wanted only young, fresh faces for news, all old hands—and not a few selected persons—should be axed.

Letters of protest have also been sent to Board member George Verghese, D-G Doordarshan K. S. Sarma and Mr Gill. The letter to Mr Chakravarty says: "Some of the dropped newsreaders have between 15 and 27 years experience. Some of those present in the Dec. 1 meeting do not find their names in the list released on Dec. 8. Others who have been inducted to read news over the last few years have also been dropped without any explanation."

"We feel these actions are arbitrary and a proper mechanism may please be put in place to evaluate

newsreaders and allocate news bulletins...Transparency is the need of the hour," it said.

Mr Gill, however, said he had no plans to weed out anyone. He said he had raised the fees for news reading from Rs 750 to Rs 1200. He wanted newsreaders to be more than just that—he wanted them to be anchorpersons, reporters and to lead the camera crews. He wanted to improve the quality of the news.

Mr Gill said he had formulated policy and left its implementation to others. "I cannot have a battalion of newsreaders. Sons, daughters and nephews of various people had been brought into Doordarshan," he said, indicating that they were people without merit. He dismissed the storm brewing in the newsrooms as the handiwork of a few disgruntled elements.

Mr Nikhil Chakravarty, who has been deluged with complaints

for redressal, has been trying to rein in Mr Gill. "He realises now that he is going too fast. Men too do not want such quick changes," Mr Chakravarty said.

He confirmed that Mr Verghese had written that there should be no changes in the structure of Prasar Bharati till the ordinance is ratified by Parliament.

Meanwhile, everyone is watching for the newsreaders' chart—to know if they are in favour or out.

Law Ministry consulted for guidelines

Bid to block desertion from DD

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI: Serious efforts are on in the Information and Broadcasting Ministry to block the voluntary retirement of engineers and others from the electronic media to join Star TV and other software companies.

According to officials in the Ministry, "voluntary retirement with full pension is not a right or prerogative of Government servants. It is only a convention." It is the discretion of the President that he allows a Government servant to retire before reaching the age of superannuation.

Now in public interest, or rather in the interest of the public broadcaster, the Ministry is consulting the Law Ministry to see how best to block the exodus to private satellite channels with their fat salaries and corporate culture. If the proposed policy guideline cannot be restricted to the electronic media, it may be given a broader base.

Not wanting to repeat the mistake of the Air India and Indian Airlines, who locked their doors after 74 pilots had bolted during the early days of the open sky policy, the new policy to be issued shortly. The details are being final-

ised by the joint secretary dealing with Press matters in consultation with the Law Ministry.

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Controversial? Who, me?

Anand Patwardhan's films convey such powerful messages that while DD blocks them, they pick up prestigious awards. He talks to **Usha Rai** about his films and his fight against communalism

When and why did you make *Ram ke Naam*?

RKN was completed in 1991 a year before the Babri Mosque was demolished. After the '84 riots in New Delhi in which more than 3000 Sikhs were massacred in the streets of Delhi I had decided to concentrate my film practice on fighting communalism. Over the years the footage became very complex and I divided the material I had shot into different parts. The first became a film on the Punjab situation called *In Memory of Friends*. This film looked at both Khalistan and State terrorism in Punjab as well as the efforts of some left groups comprising both Sikhs and Hindus who were spreading the anti-communal message of the legendary Bhagat Singh.

The same year I also went to Rajasthan after the Sati occurred there. Later when L. K. Advani began his Rath Yatra I began to follow that as well. This footage eventually became *RKN*. The Sati footage led me to explore the connection between religious violence and patriarchy which became the main focus of the film *Father, Son and Holy War*. So not one but three films grew out of the original intention to make one film against communal violence. This is because I don't ever write a script and pre-decide what a film will be, or how long it will be or exactly what it will say. Most of the final shape takes place on the editing table after I can analyse what we have shot. Documentaries need to grow integrally without a rigidity and pre-determination.

Why are you perceived as such an anti-establishment man?

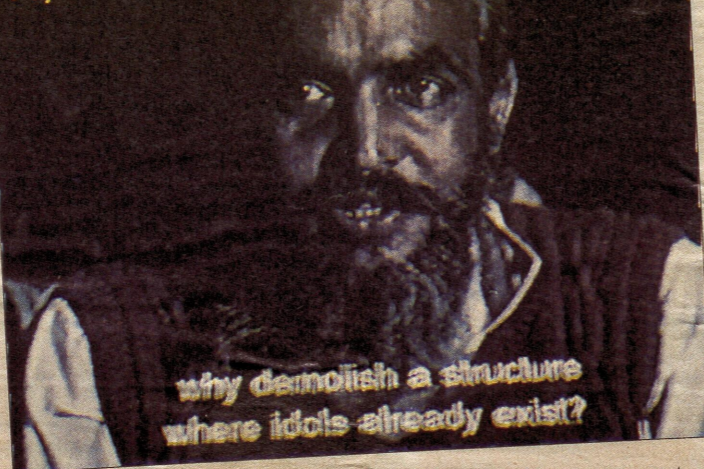
If I appear to be anti-establishment it is not because I choose to be so but because I believe in the democratic process where one must never accept injustice and the abuse of power. It amuses me that people keep calling my films "controversial" when I feel that I make the most common sense films possible. What is controversial about fighting communal hatred? Unfortunately communal forces have become so powerful and influential today that instead of them being considered controversial, those who defend a secular and democratic world are.

Do you have to fight the system to get most of your films released - some details on films and the struggle to get them shown.

So far 3 of my films have been shown on DD and each of them after winning a court case. *Bombay Our City* (1985) on the slum dwellers of Bombay won a National Award for best documentary but was rejected by DD. After a three year case The Bombay High Court ordered DD to telecast the film. Instead they appealed to the Supreme Court. Again we won and finally the film was telecast, but at midnight!

The next film *In Memory of Friends* went through the same routine and was shown only two months ago, six years after it was made. *RKN* took four years. *Father Son and Holy War* has also won two national awards and DD is sitting on it. Then will come the turn of *A Narmada Diary* on the Narmada Bachao Andolan which won the Filmfare Best Documentary award of 1996 and the Grand Prize at the Earth Vision festival in Tokyo. Unless DD has a change of heart towards these films we are all headed for more time wasting in courts. But I don't want to give my right to air these films widely because one telecast

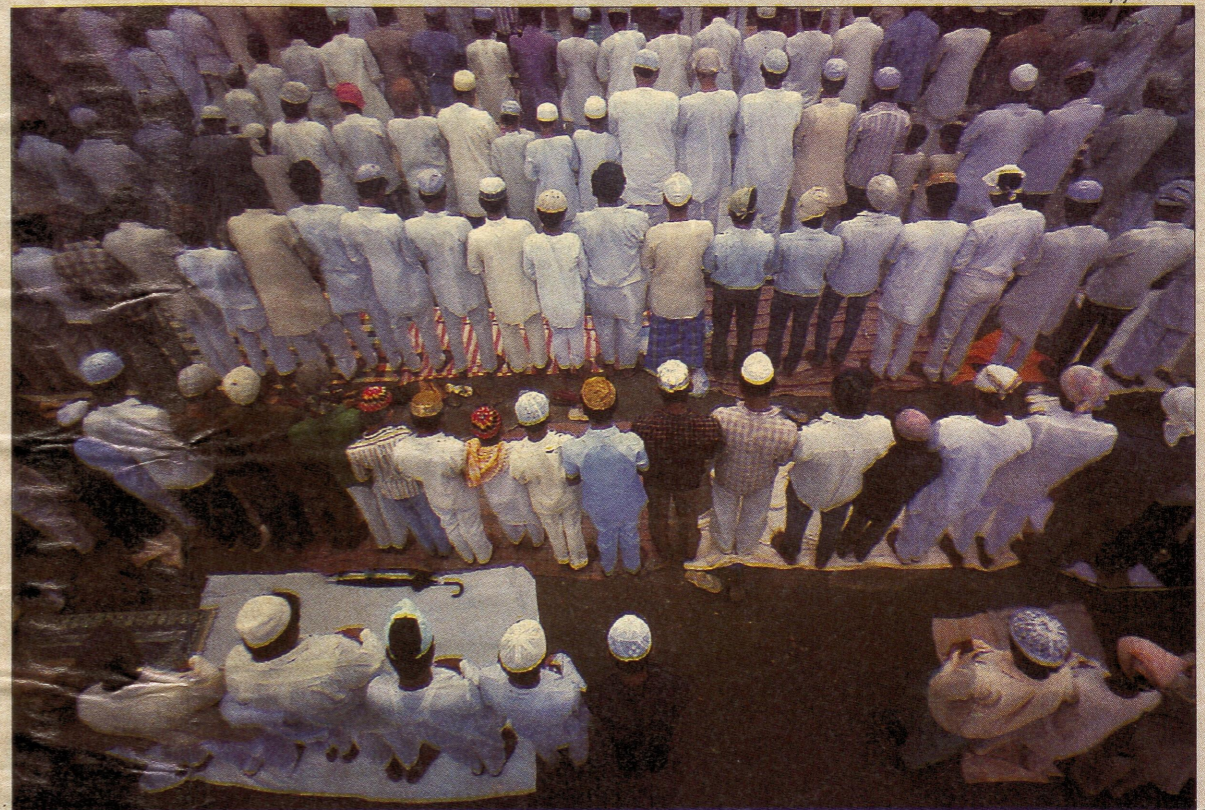
Pujari Laldas



like the one that happened last Sunday reaches more people than I could reach in 100 lifetimes of travelling around the country with my projector and films.

Some details of your struggles to get *RKN* shown...

When *RKN* was completed we submitted it for tele-



cast but got no reply to any of our letters DD would not even acknowledge our letters. As it was made a year before the demolition of the mosque I feel that had DD shown it, the frenzy of the karsevaks would have been dampened by the knowledge that politicians were using religion for financial and political gain. Also the fact that I had interviewed the priest who had with his own hands placed the Ram idols in the mosque in 1949. Finally the words of Pujari Laldas head priest of the Ram temple who spoke so passionately against those who wanted to demolish the mosque would surely have moved people.

When the film was complete I went to Lucknow for the premiere. By this time the BJP was in power in UP but our screening was full. Pujari Laldas came to it. He took a cassette of the film back to screen in his area. We were worried for him as he had spoken out so strongly against the communal forces, but he laughed it away and said that if he were to fear for his life he would have kept silent in the first place. In 1993 he was murdered. Indeed I believe that by not allowing the film on TV DD and the Government of India sacrificed the life of this brave and humane

Indian.

Have you been able to recover the cost of the film and money spent on litigation?

Costs of the film have been recovered slowly through TV, video and print sales. The legal costs are reasonable because I am supported by a lawyer, P.A. Sebastian who also believes in the cause.

What was the response of people who have seen it on DD? Will it be shown again?

The feedback is generally good but everyone complained about the image. Clearly DD did something to the telecast that drastically reduced its quality. The image was very dull compared to the Beta tape I had provided. DD never announced the screening in any newspaper. Their schedule did not mention the screening. We will complain to the court and ask for a replay.

Has the film been entered in any competition?

It has won two Indian (Filmfare and National) and three international awards.

Which are the other films you are working on?

Currently on fishworkers.

Are you working on a feature film? Why have you stuck to making documentaries?

No. Documentaries need to be made as they perform a function that cannot be replaced. Plenty of people are there to do fiction. ■

Law Ministry consulted for guidelines

Bid to block desertion from DD

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI: Serious efforts are on in the Information and Broadcasting Ministry to block the voluntary retirement of engineers and others from the electronic media to join Star TV and other software companies.

According to officials in the Ministry, "voluntary retirement with full pension is not a right or prerogative of Government servants. It is only a convention." It is the discretion of the President that he allows a Government servant to retire before reaching the age of superannuation.

Now in public interest, or rather in the interest of the public broadcaster, the Ministry is consulting the Law Ministry to see how best to block the exodus to private satellite channels with their fat salaries and corporate culture. If the proposed policy guideline cannot be restricted to the electronic media, it may be given a broader base.

Not wanting to repeat the mistake of the Air India and Indian Airlines, who locked their doors after 74 pilots had bolted during the early days of the open sky policy, the new policy to be issued shortly. The details are being final-

ised by the joint secretary dealing with Press matters in consultation with the Law Ministry.

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Good for Oscar race, not so for DD

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI: It is ironical but true that the excellent environment programme *Living on the Edge* which is in the running for a Green Oscar at the Wild Screen Festival in Bristol next month has been taken off Doordarshan.

Cash strapped Doordarshan, despite its professed commitment to social and development programmes, asked Miditech Television to find sponsors for its weekly Sunday evening environment series for it could no longer afford to commission it. The young producers, Nireet and Nikhil Alva, ran helter skelter looking for business houses seeking a green image and found they could not find one without compromising on the quality of their programmes. Most business houses have a poor environment record and to get them to sponsor

Living on the Edge seemed unethical.

Others seeking to add some green gloss to their visage offered to sponsor but with a rider that they would have a say in the editorial content of the episodes. An oil company even wanted episodes of its innovative clean technologies. So Miditech went back to Doordarshan with its begging bowl. DD refused to oblige and *Living on the Edge* which had a successful run for almost three years was yanked off.

Then came the big news that *Living on the Edge* was in the final run for the Green Oscar along with entries from Mexico and Kenya in the TVE (Television Trust-environment) category. The three half-hour episodes entered by Miditech are on denotification of Melghat tiger reserve, Arsenic poisoning in West Bengal and the Dang tribals of Gujarat. The fact that Alvas' programmes had been selected for competition from 317 films and over 450 entries was

indeed something to crow about and there was a big splash about it in most newspapers.

The Wild Screen festival is organised once in two years by the International World Wide Fund and five Oscars are given. At the last festival too Mike Pandey's 'The last migration' on the capture of the Sarguja elephants had bagged an award.

Since it would not be good for Doordarshan's image to take off *Living on the Edge* when it was in the running for the Oscar, the mandarins of Mandi House agreed to commission six more episodes which would have seen the Alvas through the festival period in October. But Doordarshan wanted a written assurance that the young film makers would never again ask the Government to sponsor their programme. Though excited about the new lease of life for the serial, the Alvas were not willing to write off their legal right to approach DD again.

Good programmes which are

not entertainment oriented are slowly being taken off Doordarshan. While the United Front government seeks to give a new, clean image to DD it has not been able to get over its obsession for film-based entertainers, primarily because they are the only ones that bring in the cash and the viewership. *Living on the Edge* along with *The World This Week* had one of the best ratings (5.5) for English programmes but even so it could not get sponsors.

The fact that the Alvas are the sons of the former Congress Minister Margaret Alva and Doordarshan has already paid them Rs 1.6 crore as commission is held against them. Instead of grovelling before Doordarshan, the brighter producers are already moving to the new satellite channels. Both BBC and the Discovery Channel are looking for bright young producers and when they commission programmes it would not be six to 13 episodes but 100 to 150 capsules.

8 cover story



The day and night news store

With so many channels flooding our lives, it's not just entertainment that is getting competitive. So is news. And now Star TV is ready to launch a 24-hour news channel. **Usha Rai** finds out more



Confident of making money for Rupert Murdoch even with news, Star TV is now gearing up for a 24-hour news channel on the DTH platform, from June. Though the future of DTH is blurred till the Broadcasting Bill is passed by Parliament, the channel is preparing for the big jump where it would be in direct competition with 24-hour news and current affairs channels of BBC and CNN.

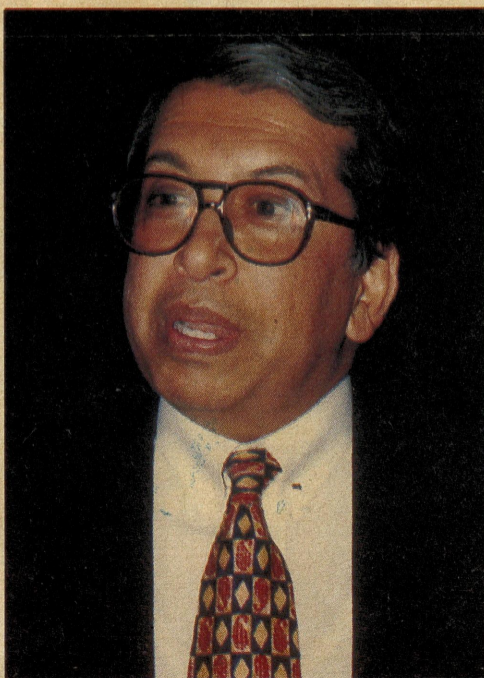
Satellite news channels and news programmes usually do not bring in revenue. So the Star TV/Prannoy Roy team has created waves by making profits within a month of the launch of Star News. Star TV guaranteed NDTV Rs 4 lakh per day for its news programmes and took on the responsibility of marketing it. Whatever money is made over and above the Rs 4 lakh, by selling time, goes into the pockets of Star. Though R. Basu, CEO of Star TV, could not remember the revenue raked in — or may be he is deliberately keeping it under wraps — he admits that he has not looked back since launching Star News.

Not having uplinking facilities from India has not deterred Basu. But he does admit ruefully that the facility would help Star to not only give updated news but increase its profits. Canning and sending news is cumbersome and expensive.

While Prannoy Roy and his outfit will continue to hog a major chunk of the programming, Rajat Sharma and Newstrack will be enlarging the canvas with current affairs programmes. Living on the Edge, the environment programme by the Alva brothers, and films on wild life by the Bedi brothers will give the channel a special edge.

Documentaries by the Bedi brothers have been making waves on Channel Four and BBC and getting them for Star is a coup of sorts for Basu.

To cope with the demands of a 24-hour news and current affairs channel both NDTV and Star TV are expanding rapidly. In fact you can see the manner in which Star TV is expanding. Good Morning India has been taken off DD and predictably has joined the Star bandwagon. With two hours of Good Morning India, where Amar Talwar and his co-host Shireen prattle on about weather, analyse the morning newspapers, take you to India Gate to watch aerobics and then



take you for business news and analysis, a considerable amount of news footage is already available.

NDTV has employed over 150 correspondents and production staff and more are likely to join. Star TV, in turn, has been hiring news editors.

Prannoy Roy, Onkar Goswami and Rajat Sharma all do their own thing to breathe life into Star TV's news and current affairs channel; (below) R. Basu: poised to be proud

Indira Mansingh and her team ensure that Star TV's news code is adhered to. But with a 24-hours current affairs programme, more senior media persons are likely to join the Star network.

Mansingh, who was earlier heading Doordarshan's news room, says Star's guidelines are not that different from Doordarshan's. But while DD categorically states 'don't do this or that', Star says 'watch out for this and that.'

Fair and balanced coverage of news is given top priority, says Mansingh. Basu himself gives priority to gender sensitivity in news coverage and for more environment stories. Though a foreign channel, eager to rule over the Indian skies, Star TV is quite determined not to hurt national sentiments in any way. Glitches, like the one that cost Nicky Bedi her programme on Star TV, will not be tolerated. "We have to watch out for slander and ensure that Star News is not caught up in legal wrangles," says Mansingh. But the censorship is gentle. Critical comments are aired only if backed by sufficient sound bytes.

So Star's day and night news channel is on its way. And in spite of the tricky ground on which it is perched, with so much enthusiasm and careful planning going into the affair, it would be interesting to watch how far it goes.

Channel vision, empty pockets

By Usha Rai

Is the honeymoon with television over? The euphoria of the early '90s undoubtedly seems to have evaporated as the big fish in the television business are swallowing the smaller ones. One of the worst victims of the slump in the money market has been television.

There is just not enough money in the advertising market to sustain the 40 odd channels visible today or the small software companies that have mushroomed. Several journalists who left the print media in droves attracted by the glamour and big money of the TV industry are limping back to the print media a chastened lot. Others, who were earning Rs 40,000 to Rs 60,000 a month, are finding it difficult to crawl back to the comparatively lower wages of the print media.

Business India TV, one of the first private Indian channels to be launched, is seldom able to pay its staff on time. Money is always scarce. But then Ashok Advani, who has this marvellous knack of raising resources when he is literally down and the market is counting his knockout, resurfaces and the nervous staff, furtively looking for a new job, get a windfall in wages. But the staff of BiTV walk on a razor's edge. They don't know if they will get their next month's salary and in any case not many people are watching BiTV. Being on a good satellite is vital for visibility.

When the Asia Business News India, a 24 hours channel of eco-

omic news, was launched in partnership with TV18 and the Hinduja's and a \$300 million company formed, the brightest and the best economic writers gravitated towards it. Though the channel was noticed, financially it limped along. So this January ABN Singapore, the 51 per cent shareholder, decided to rescind its partnership with Hinduja's who had been given the responsibility

set back TV18. In four months about 20 to 25 people (journalists as well as production staff) either walked out or were asked to leave.

Among those who walked out were Hardev Sanotra, Executive Editor and the Bombay Chief of Bureau Daksesh Parekh. While some left for greener pastures in Zee TV, others left demoralised unable to see a solution to ABNI's fi-

Broadcasting Bill which provides for uplinking facilities was pushed through last year, Sanotra is confident the TV industry would have got a financial boost.

Television is a capital intensive medium that needs heavy investments, he says. To succeed you need among other things to be a long time player. Though Sony Entertainment had a whopping loss last year, it has been able to survive because of its deep pockets. Rupert Murdoch has also given a long rope of five years to Star TV.

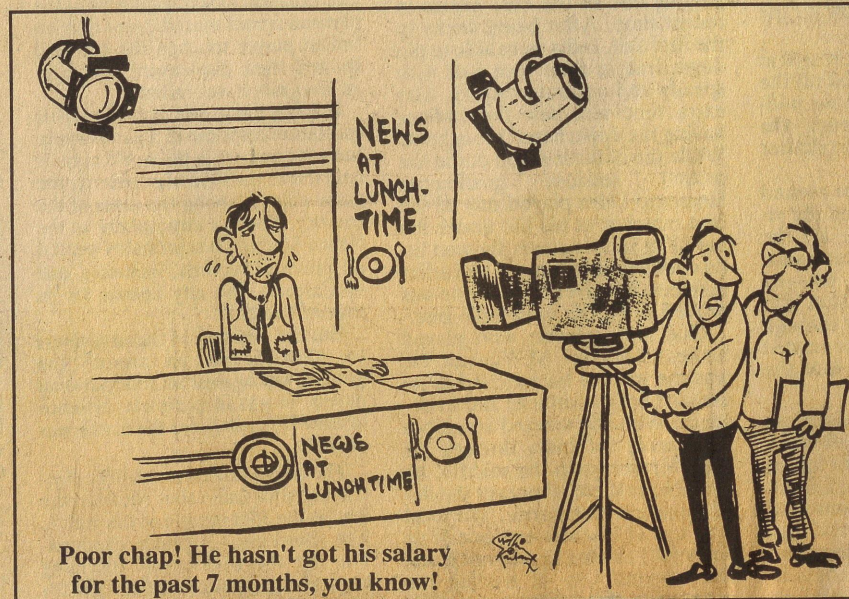
Though approximately Rs 800 crore advertising revenue was generated last year, it was 25 to 30 per cent less than anticipated. Doordarshan maybe everyone's favourite whipping boy but because of its tremendous reach and viewership it still manages to grab most of the advertising revenue. In fact Information and Broadcasting Minister C M Ibrahim was literally crowing about the Rs

they had hit big time. But Freemantle limited its operation to game shows for Home TV and those too have now wound up. With no business in hand, the company may have to pack up and go home.

When Dileep Padgaonkar walked out of *Times of India* to set up an independent software company APCA, it was seen as a bold venture. But the company, despite Padgaonkar's clout and ability to wangle programmes from Doordarshan, has barely stayed afloat. "Many of us have not been paid for a long time," admits Padgaonkar. Payments are made when the money comes in. Four people have walked out disillusioned and with empty wallets. They have been assured payment as and when the cash rolls in. But APCA still has 94 people.

Is the disillusionment of the journalists only because of the slump in the money market? The language of the two media are different, says Padgaonkar. "While TV has an emotive appeal, the print media's strength lies in its analytic ability and depth. Images of TV cannot substitute for words," says Padgaonkar.

TV is highly competitive and demanding and not everyone makes it. Fame has to be instant. You have to have a TV presence or you are doomed. However, Hardev Sanotra feels that a good journalist will do well everywhere. Paranjy Guha Thakurta of ABNI says print media is more individualistic whereas in TV, team work is essential for success. Some journalists adapt to the new medium - but with ulcers! Maybe that too will change with time and money.



for marketing. It is expected to announce a new partner soon.

TV18, one of the finest production houses, also suffered a financial crunch in the last three months of 1996 as the Reserve Bank of India would not release on time the foreign exchange for TV18's 23 per cent equity in the new company. ABN held back some of TV18's production money and this further

financial problems. One of the copy editors of ABNI opted for the security of the print media.

Even Home TV, backed by international business houses, had to close down its Bombay office. Jain Studios wound up operations some time ago and no one is watching the NEPC channel. Times TV as well as Anand Bazaar Patrika's TV Bazaar have folded up. If the

572 crore revenue generated by DD in 1996-1997. Zee TV and some of the southern channels have also made profits.

Worst hit by the slump in the economy are the smaller players and software companies. When Freemantle-US, which makes the extremely popular *Baywatch* and *Grace Under Fire*, started its India operations, young producers thought

'Good Morning India' may be stopped

By Usha Rai

NEW DELHI: New Delhi Television Ltd. has threatened to stop its programme 'Good Morning India' on Doordarshan if Director-General K. S. Sarma does not reply within a week to its queries on the terms and conditions of the programme.

According to NDTV's April 19, 1996 contract with Doordarshan the telecast fee was fixed at Rs 25,000 per episode with 720 seconds of free commercial time (FCT). However, Doordarshan announced a new rate card, effective from Nov. 15, which raised the telecast fee to Rs 1,50,000 and reduced the FCT to 300 seconds.

Since Dec. 9 NDTV has been trying to find out from DD's commercial wing if the rate card or the contract for Good Morning India

would be applicable. Attempts to elicit the information from Mr Sarma also failed. On the advice of the commercial wing, NDTV has been utilising only 300 seconds of FCT — but this, it has pointed out, is causing enormous losses every day.

In fact the strongly-worded letter accuses Doordarshan of a policy of victimisation against NDTV. It maintains that between July and October 1996, eight of its programmes had been taken off either by drastically changing their terms and conditions so that they become uneconomical or on specious arguments that apply only to NDTV.

In the case of News Tonight too the telecast fee was raised by 400 per cent and the FCT reduced by 200 per cent. Then the telecast time was changed from 10 p.m. to 10.30 p.m. making the programme completely unviable.

Could we have the Bill, do you think?

There are a hundred questions about the Broadcast Bill. Usha Rai talks to some media experts and looks for a few answers

To coincide with the meetings of the Joint Select Committee of Parliament on the Broadcast Bill there have been a spate of workshops. Two distinct groups can be seen operating - those lobbying for the unrestricted growth of the TV industry and others pitching for public service broadcasting and the Prasar Bharati in a market driven economy.

With the stakes being high for channel operators, particularly those beaming in from other countries, many of them have begun using public relation agencies to promote their point-of-view. But it is possible to hear some excellent presentations by media watchers - foreign as well as Indian. The two most controversial issues discussed at some length at the consultation held by the Centre for Media Studies were 49 per cent cap on foreign equity and cross media restrictions.

Dr Devendra Verma, senior Vice President of Space Systems/Loral in the US, who was closely involved with the launching of the ISRO's site experiments with Dr Kiran Karnik, has been looking at India and its potential for direct-to-home (DTH) technology. He supports regulation. All countries have it, he points out. But the Broadcasting Bill cannot be a Bible. It cannot look after the interests of everyone.

In most countries with modern, upmarket television industry, for-

foreign companies have moved in and Dr Verma feels that a 49 per cent foreign equity is reasonable. Parents, as well as governments, all over the world want less violence, sex and provocation on TV. But Dr Verma says if there is not enough money in the Indian market for broadcasting - and very clearly the situation today is quite bleak with just two companies Sun and Zee making profits - the government should encourage higher foreign investments.

For the new DTH technology, offering a bouquet of 80 to 100 channels, the investments are higher - over Rs1,000 crores - and it will take four to five years for investors to get the returns. He believes that the Government should get its share of revenue. It should

then use the money for pushing public service broadcasting like it has done in the US where frequencies are given free to the channel operators and in return they carry public interest programmes.

On the controversial issue of cross media restriction, Dr Verma feels if the Government is apprehensive of the print barons gaining monopoly over media, they could restrict them from getting into news and current affairs. But there should be no objection to their operating music, environment and science channels. But as someone involved in the building of high power satellites, Dr Verma points out that the Bill is silent on the allocation of frequencies and slots and has failed to provide for the convergence of television, tele-

phone, information data, and the Internet on digital compression technology.

Not giving uplinking service to foreign channels from India was a serious mistake. Now special consideration should be shown to foreign channels uplinking from neighbouring countries. It is only when the foreign signals are being downlinked that the code of ethics should be strictly enforced to ensure quality programming. In the DTH service in the US, he says the Government has made it mandatory to carry three to five public interest channels on varied subjects.

Prof Munroe Price, Director of the Oxford Media Law Programme and currently

working with Youshiva University, New York says there is no model broadcast law. Such laws have to be country specific. The Indian Broadcast Bill is more restrictive on cross media ownership than the laws in other countries. The purpose of the restriction is to ensure plurality of voice on the electronic media. Regulation to prevent monopoly of the print media should be in tune with other regulations for industry. But Prof Price warns that if India wants strong, competitive television companies it should not force them to operate with hands tied.

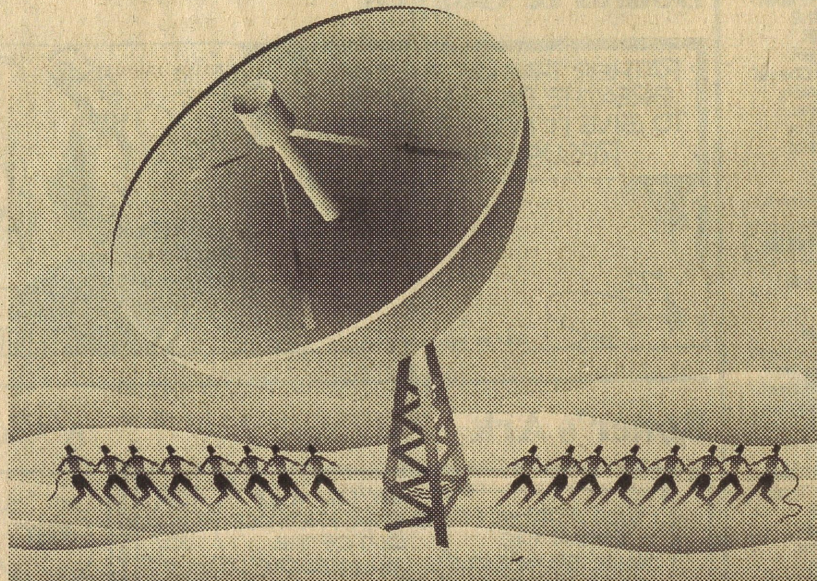
In the US, cross media rules prevent a business house from running a newspaper and a TV or a radio station from the same city. So the *Washington Post* can and does own a television station but

not in Washington. In Europe there are no cross media restrictions. Instead of having any cap on equity, the audience share of TV companies is generally 15 or 30 per cent of the TV viewers in a city. In France 30 per cent of the shares in a TV station of channel must be owned by French newspaper proprietors in order to protect the advertising interests of the print media, says a colleague of Prof Price.

Both Dr Verma and Prof Price feel that there has to be a balance between public interest broadcasting, news and entertainment on a broadcast system. Even a channel with the best produced public interest programme would find survival difficult without advertising support. In UK there is more debate on social issues on TV than in the other countries. Channel 4 is a public interest channel supported by a portion of the advertising revenue earned by the other channels.

Mr George Verghese, associated with several media reports also lashes out at foreign equity restrictions. "Has India's vital interest been hurt by unlicensed foreign channels beaming into India for six years now?" he asks. Foreign broadcasters have been responsive to what is probably the largest free broadcasting market. Too much control could drive them out, he warns. But Verghese also feels that the Bill caters only to the elite. Emphasising the need for community broadcasting, he says some 800 million people of the country have been left out of the purview of the Bill. There are a lot of contradictions in the Prasar Bharati Act and the Broadcast Bill and the two need to be integrated.

Though Sharad Pawar, as chairman of the Select Committee, and Information & Broadcasting Minister Jaipal Reddy have been studiously listening to divergent views, only time will tell if public concern is reflected in the Broadcast Bill. ■



Spirit is willing, funds are weak

Plans of celebrating the golden jubilee with films on the freedom struggle may fall through because of lack of funds, says Usha Rai



To communicate with the masses – particularly the younger generations – the glory of Independence we could have had a retrospective of films dealing with the freedom struggle, the trauma of Partition and the lives of the political leaders who turned dreams into reality. But though the 50th anniversary of Independence is just a little over a month away, the Information and Broadcasting Ministry's Programme – a package of 13 films for 513 smaller cities of India – has been stymied for want of funds.

The Ministry approached the National Coordination Committee for the 50th Independence Day celebrations with a request that Rs 1.25 crore be provided for making prints of the 13 selected films. The Human Resource Development Minister S.R. Bommai, who has a key role in the Committee, shot down the request because with a budget of just Rs 50 crore he is being besieged with proposals and demands for resources. Mr B.P. Singh, Secretary, Culture, also pointed out that all ministries were supposed to budget for the 50th anniversary and raise their own resources.

Many of the films to be shown are classics. All of them are from the archives of the NFDC. Films like *Tamas*, *Train to Pakistan*, *Garam Hawa*, Richard Attenborough's *Gandhi* and Shyam Benegal's *The Making Of The Mahatma* are extremely evocative. Other films to be shown are *Nehru*, *Sardar*, *Ambedkar* (still under production), *Sarojini Naidu*, *Subhas Chandra Bose*, *Abul Kalam Azad, 1942* and *Phoolle Nahin*. An elaborate plan had been drawn up

to show films in all the small cities of the country from this August 15 to Independence Day next year.

The I&B Ministry which has been plagued by a resource crunch and does not have enough money even for its TV serials, points out that it is only asking for the cost of new prints.

It is not asking for royalty etc. Dissemination of films on such an important national theme, they maintain is not just the responsibility of the Ministry. It should be a matter of national pride.

The Maharashtra government too put in its bid for re-enacting the August Kranti Maidan curtain raiser – the historic day in 1942 when Aruna Asaf Ali unfurled the Indian flag in Mumbai. The HRD Ministry, which is disbursing the funds for the national events, cried off. The State was curtly told it was a State show and funds should be raised within the State. Having reconciled to funds not being available from the Centre, Maharashtra has decided to fend

for itself.

But the I&B Ministry has nothing to fall back on. It did not even have funds for the serials and is hoping to recover the money from the HRD Ministry. But it does seem a shame that a venture that could rekindle the excitement and trauma of Independence should be shelved for want of a paltry Rs 1.25 crore. There is a whole generation of young people who are growing up without knowing the significance of the freedom struggle or the importance of the democracy that we seek to cherish. Nothing could recapture better the spirit of 1947 than the big screen.

Among the films planned were
Tamas (above),
Train To Pakistan,
Garam Hawa,
Attenborough's
Gandhi and Shyam
Benegal's *The Making Of The Mahatma*.

Free at last

By Usha Rai

Ressurrecting a Bill that has been in limbo for seven years is no mean achievement. Pushing through various amendments to the outdated Prasar Bharati Bill through an ordinance, a Prasar Bharati Board was set up. For the first time there was an autonomous AIR and Doordarshan.

The fact that two important members of the Citizens' Initiative for Radio and Television Autonomy (Jan Prasar), I. K. Gujral and Jaipal Reddy, are the Prime Minister and Information and Broadcasting Minister, has facilitated this resuscitation of an almost dead Bill. Minor hitches in the ratification of the Ordinance by Parliament in six months, however, persist.

But a whole month after the new board was set up, there was no indication of which way the freed electronic media would go. Also, despite the Government's public postures of being gender sensitive, the board has just one woman—Romila Thapar. A perspective plan for AIR and DD anchored at the grass-roots has to be drawn up and the public service broadcasters have to get an identity.


It is apparent that the members of the new board are not working as a team. The executive member S. S. Gill, who outlined his plans for an autonomous electronic media, has been reined-in by the board which wants a collective decision on all important issues. So, a whole month after the board was set up, no major decisions have

Jan Prasar feels that Doordarshan should transcend the elite viewership and cater to those who have no cable TV and are

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- DEVELOPMENT -

Cursing nursing

The manner in which Zee TV has demeaned a noble profession is unpardonable, says Usha Rai

ABOUT two years go at a meeting of film censors a document was circulated that politicians and senior police officials should not be depicted as being corrupt or of poor moral character. The 'debased' projection of public servants it was felt made it difficult for them to function.

Around the same time the whole country was in deep anguish over the sex, violence and crude dance sequences shown in the block buster movies. Even Members of Parliament were disturbed and there was a marathon debate on the issue with film producers, women's organisations, film critics and actors participating.

But despite all that sound and fury nothing has happened. The dons of Bollywood were too powerful and one of the arguments used against disciplining the industry was that if the poor film producer had to survive he had to be upmarket. The market was being determined by satellite channels which had no curbs and were pumping in undiluted western culture and soft porn.

One has little sympathy with the politicians and policeman, who most people would admit have been shown in their true colours. But the manner in which Zee TV has demeaned the nursing profession is unpardonable. Even if it claims that *Dil ka Doctor* was pure entertainment and fiction, it has trivialised the nursing profession and shown our hard working Florence Nightingales as woolly-headed sex symbols.

If the government does nothing to restore their dignity, the exodus of nurses to foreign countries where they get better wages as well as respect is likely to increase. According to the All India Nurses Federation about 20,000 to 30,000 nurses leave the country every year to improve their prospects abroad. There are just 1.5 lakh nurses in the country when there is need for at least 5 lakh.

Ever since the first 'promos' of the film showing nurses flitting around in miniskirts appeared on television, the nurses have been on the warpath. Not even a fight for higher wages could have united them as the current issue has.

They have run from Information and Broadcasting Ministry to the Health Ministry, the film censors and even to the courts, but to no avail. Their efforts to

get the humiliating scenes axed have failed and even while the I&B ministry was seeking a review of the film it was shown not once but twice on Zee. Since October 4, nurses in most hospitals across the country — except Kerala and West Bengal — have been coming to work in their civilian clothes making it difficult for patients to identify them.

Ever so often women's groups come on the streets protesting against the manner in which women are portrayed. They have blackened film hoardings that seek to glorify them as sex symbols. Now an entire profession identified with women has been tarred by a film maker seeking to make a fast buck by offering a film so obviously designed to titillate.

It is equally shocking that actor Anupam Kher, who was so angry with journalists for tarnishing his name, should actually defend a bad film because he played the lead role in it.

The long sequence in which nurses in mini skirts are shown dancing with ward boys is in poor taste. In another scene a nurse is shown with her leg on the shoulder of a doctor and in a third the doctor is shown crawling between the legs of nurses. The opening shot shows a nurse and a patient locked in an embrace and a doctor walks in but fails to react.

After the film was shown there was a deluge of angry letters to the Federation.

That isn't all. Children of nurses are asking them to quit if this is what their profession is all about. "My son is studying to be an architect. He is so ashamed after seeing the film that he has threatened that he will leave home if I continue to work," a nurse lamented.

If the film can have such strong impact on a grown boy, will the hordes of semi-literate people trooping into public hospitals have any respect for the nurses? Will they not look on them as play things?

The nurses are demanding censorship of the lewd scenes and an assurance that such films will not be shown on television again. Surely it not too much to ask.

Soaps lather on women's sob stories

by Usha Rai

NEW DELHI, Nov 17: The Phillips Top 10 show on May 5 this year showed a skit in which a bride-burning consultancy was held. The macabre humour of the programme is reflected in a mother-in-law seeking professional advice on how to get rid of her daughter-in-law.

The ostensible reason for the death warrant is:

- a) The daughter-in-law does not touch her feet in the morning and;
- b) She has not produced the *ghar ka chirag* though married for two years. Meanwhile, her son-in-law, too, is nurturing ideas of getting rid of his wife as well as the mother-in-law, whom he refers to as "the fat cow."

Can social problems of the country be distorted in this manner even in the name of humour on television, which has mass viewership?

The Media Advocacy Group (MAG), which is involved in

public interest research on the portrayal of women in mass media, monitored DD-1, DD-2, Zee TV and Sun TV in Delhi, Bombay, Bangalore and Madras from April to August this year and was appalled by the distorted projection of serious issues whether it was child marriage, violence at home, dowry issues or bride burning.

MAG monitored some 200 hours of programming on TV and analysed 150 hours. While the most disturbing visual images are being created by the serial *Hasratein*, others like *Andaz*, *Campus*, *Daastan* and even *Swabhiman* have also been faulted.

In an episode of *Hasratein*, a father is shown branding his unmarried daughter for getting pregnant. At a time when the international community at Beijing was debating the complex issue of parental responsibility and the rights of the child, on Indian TV the worst kind of imagery was being portrayed,

says Akhila Shivadass of MAG.

In *Andaz*, a wife is locked inside a cupboard by a husband when she taunts him. While she screams from inside the cupboard, he sips his whiskey. The viewer's sympathy has all along been in favour of the husband because the woman is shown as totally evil.

The message is that the husband is justified in the use of violence. This kind of violence is pernicious because it is used in a hierarchical manner — by the husband against his wife or the boss against his employee. Even the promotional clippings of serials start off with the slapping of subordinates like a domestic help or even the wife.

Sexual advances made by the boss to his secretary are shown as part of the office routine in *Hasratein* as well as *Daastan*. Most serials thrive on adultery and extra-marital relationships. After one such sequence of extra-marital sex, the camera focuses on the *magalsutra* of the

woman carelessly thrown on one side of the bed.

In a society prejudicial to women, such shots would further damn the woman and show her in a subordinate status, the study maintains. "Sexual innuendos of this kind should be legally prohibited on TV," says Ms Shivadass.

Though no one wants censorship, there should be norms to determine media imagery, she says. Even if bigamy is shown in a fictional manner, there should be a statutory warning stating that it is illegal and can be penalised. The educational aspect have to be integrated into the films, the study shows.

The formula that most TV producers have evolved centres around upper middle class families with business enterprises. The men and women are ambitious and highly individualistic. There are mega mergers, murders,

Women become the bone of contention because rivalry over women is part of business rivalry.

Women are often depicted as unstable, alcoholic and even mentally deranged. Children are shown as drug addicts. In the changing ethos having a girl friend is the done thing for boys. But it is only the foolish girl who is caught having a baby. "Normal families with some conflict are not shown on TV are more," laments Ms Shivadass.

MAG plans to share its findings with the I&B Ministry, NGOs and the Censor Board so that they realise the dimensions of the problem. It is irresponsible imagery and information and not just vulgarity and obscenity. While seeking to deconstruct the cumulative impact of the images on senior school and college students, MAG is keen on setting up a consumer cell on TV.