

# Doordarshan Diplomacy

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# About the author

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Nandini Lakshman is a Mumbai-based business journalist and editor, who has for three decades chronicled India's economic ascent in urban and rural landscapes. She has worked at national newspapers including the *Economic Times* and *Business Standard*, and international magazines such as *Asiaweek*, *Businessweek* and *Time*. She was a consultant to the World Bank and has reported for the Economist Intelligence Unit. She is currently a contributor to the University of Pennsylvania's online business journal *Knowledge@Wharton*, the Hong Kong-based *China Business Law Journal*, and *India Business Law Journal*. She has a BSc from Mumbai University.



# Acknowledgements

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# Summary

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Over the last decade, television channels, along with social and digital media, have become essential tools in any country's efforts to promote its world view and foreign policy. However, Doordarshan, India's 55-year-old public service broadcaster, with multiple national and regional channels, has lagged behind in effectively using this modern medium of international persuasion.

It is a time when political and economic development models are being questioned or are in flux in many parts of the world. India's growing global engagement and the success of its democracy can be a model for countries looking for a replicable and equitable alternative to the mould promoted by the West-dominated media.

So far, Doordarshan's international channel, DD India, has not projected this unique role and profile of India. On the other hand, in recent years, a host of global channels, many of them state-run, such as Russia Today, Qatar's Al Jazeera, China's CCTV, and France 24, have stepped into the space long-dominated by the UK's public service broadcaster BBC and the U.S.'s CNN. These relatively new channels have now become the definitive voices of their countries in an evolving global arena.

At the same time, despite their pervasive presence, foreign electronic media have been unable to interpret India's unique democratic processes and systems. DD India can step into this gap to become the international media-mediated voice of the country.

Exploring the potential of a revamped DD India at this time is critical; international curiosity about India is growing. India's new government is making overtures to various countries and the world is watching the emergent policies of the new prime minister. India is increasingly seen as an alternate economic bloc with new business models and developmental experiments that can be replicated across the growing economies. It is also a country seeking foreign investments, and it is the headquarters of various transnational companies as well as Indian multinationals.



Equally important, India is seen as a nuclear power and a significant voice on the Asian stage—both positions India does not adequately project, but which other countries look to for their own strategic positioning.

Foreign policy is important and the world wants to know what the Indian government has to say on a wide range of issues. So far, India's foreign policy and its communication have been reticent. India must have its own well-articulated alternative perspective on global events. In the absence of a projection of its viewpoint, India is losing the information war because no one is hearing the Indian voice on world affairs.

Despite the global interest in India today, DD India has little brand equity within the country and none outside. Part of the reason is that Doordarshan and All India Radio are run by Prasar Bharati, the state's public service broadcaster. Prasar Bharati has had a tumultuous existence since it was set up in 1997.

Although the Prasar Bharati Act ostensibly freed Doordarshan and AIR from government supervision, in reality the government still controls the broadcaster. It remains answerable to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting. The ministry provides funding and salaries, and assigns career diplomats to head Prasar Bharati.

DD reaches the largest number of TV-owning households in India—234 million. DD can use its early access to the schedules of government officials and ministers to stay ahead of private channels in preparing programmes and interviews. These and other factors make DD India a potentially influential channel—and an attractive proposition for the best journalists and reporters.

There's another good reason for DD to go global: BBC and CNN, two of the largest global broadcasters, are cash-strapped, as is the western print media; they have curtailed coverage and pulled out correspondents from many locations across the world. DD can replace the authoritative opinion of these channels with powerful voices from emerging economies. Government funding can support the making of new, well-produced, innovative content, particularly programmes with an Indian perspective but global appeal.

Over time, in a beneficial reversal, taking DD global will rejuvenate the domestic channel. It will gain from the infusion of talent and new technology that was not available during its heyday in the 1980s, and these new inputs will allow DD to compete robustly with private channels. The independence of the international arm will rub off on the domestic operation, helping DD regain its national viewers and credibility.

This report proposes that for Doordarshan to become the voice of India and showcase the nation, Prasar Bharati must have complete autonomy. The report puts forth recommendations for Doordarshan's global channel, DD India, to become the definitive voice of the country's foreign policy as well as of its views on global affairs.

# Doordarshan Diplomacy

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## 1. Introduction

Over the past decade, rapid changes in technology and communications have impacted, more than ever before, the way countries across the world handle their diplomacy and foreign policy. In turn, global diplomacy too has evolved and responded to the changing demands and expectations of the public.

The transforming, technology-driven media are challenging political as well as geographical boundaries, and becoming a vital resource for news and views about global affairs. Television channels, along with social and digital media, have now become essential tools in the foreign policy discourse.

Various global channels have established their presence in a field previously dominated by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Cable News Network (CNN). The BBC, a semi-autonomous public service broadcaster of the United Kingdom<sup>i</sup> and the privately-owned CNN of the U.S.<sup>ii</sup> were for long the face of international news and perspectives.

Increasingly though, their hegemony is being challenged by newer entrants offering different dimensions of the news as well as alternative perspectives. Russia Today, Al Jazeera, CCTV, and France 24 are now regarded as the definitive voices of Moscow, West Asia, China, and France, respectively.<sup>iii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> The BBC operates under a Royal Charter and a licence agreement from Britain's Home Secretary.

<sup>ii</sup> CNN was set up by Turner Broadcasting System in 1980. Time Warner acquired Turner Broadcasting in 1996.

<sup>iii</sup> Russia Today, started by the Kremlin in 2005, creates programming in Arabic, English, and Spanish. The English and Spanish channels were renamed RT in 2009. Al Jazeera was launched by the Emir of Qatar in 1996; Al Jazeera English was launched in 2006 and Al Jazeera America in August 2013. CCTV is the state-run broadcaster in mainland China; the international channel, CCTV News, was launched in September 2000. France 24, the international and current affairs channel owned by the French government, began broadcasting in December 2006; it also has English and Arabic channels.

India too has a foot in the door: DD World was launched in 1995 with a mission to build bridges of communication with the Indian diaspora of over 25 million<sup>iv</sup> and to showcase the real India—its culture, values, traditions, and diversity. However, the channel, now called DD India, is yet to be effectively used to explain the country's global and domestic positions and perspectives.

Exploring the vast and untapped potential of a global Doordarshan channel at this time is critical; international curiosity about India is growing. We are increasingly seen as an alternate economic bloc with new business models and development experiments that can be replicated across the emerging economies. India is also a country seeking foreign investments, and it is the headquarters of various transnational companies as well as Indian multinationals.

Equally important, India is seen as a nuclear power and a significant voice on the Asian stage—both positions we do not adequately project, but which other countries look to for their own strategic positioning.

Foreign policy is important and the world wants to know what the Indian government has to say on a host of issues. So far, India's foreign policy, as well as its communication of this policy, have been reticent. India must have its own well-articulated alternative perspective on global events, which has to be effectively communicated. In the absence of a strong projection of its viewpoint, India is losing the information war because no one is hearing the Indian voice on world affairs.<sup>v</sup>

Finally, there is India's soft power, which has significant potential as a critical component of modern diplomacy; it is a

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<sup>iv</sup>Estimates of the Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs. [1]

<sup>v</sup>Views expressed by Sreeram Chaulia, professor and dean at the Jindal School of International Affairs, Haryana, during a telephone interview in June 2013.

<sup>vi</sup>The term soft power was coined by Joseph S. Nye, an American scholar and policy-maker in the late 1980s. Soft power, he said, is the ability of a country to persuade others without force or coercion.

<sup>vii</sup>Views expressed by Sreeram Chaulia, professor and dean at the Jindal School of International Affairs, Haryana, during a telephone interview in June 2013.

front on which India can confidently compete in the world.<sup>vi</sup> If the U.S. is seen as an exemplar of democracy and therefore its culture is deemed attractive, even though its foreign policy may not have many supporters, India too is equally attractive—it is a pluralistic society; the birthplace of global religions and home to the Dalai Lama, English-speaking professionals, and secular values; it is the land of Mahatma Gandhi and his teachings of non-violence, of rich cuisines and a thriving popular culture.

So if the U.S. has Google, the iPod, MTV, Hollywood, and Microsoft, India has Gandhi, Bollywood, yoga and curry—all of which can be effectively projected though a revamped global television channel that broadcasts the voice and views of India.

At times, our soft power is indeed effectively used. For example, when Khaleda Zia was the prime minister of Bangladesh, visiting Indian diplomats catered to her fondness for Indian television serials by carrying tapes of long-running Indian television soap operas.

In 2011, the Ministry of External Affairs did launch a crop of programmes—such as *India Global*, *India Is*, *India File* and *India-Africa: a shared future*—on the AIR FM Gold channel and on YouTube, to promote India and its soft power. [2] But a lot more has to be done.

This report examines the current state of Doordarshan and formulates an agenda for transforming the channel into an effective foreign policy tool for India.

## 2. Doordarshan over the decades

Doordarshan began as a terrestrial network on September 15, 1959. The transmission was done with radio waves and antennae were used for reception. The telecasts were regional and in black-and-white; it was only during the 1982 Asian Games that DD switched to colour and national telecast.

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<sup>vi</sup>The term soft power was coined by Joseph S. Nye, an American scholar and policy-maker in the late 1980s. Soft power, he said, is the ability of a country to persuade others without force or coercion.

Today, the 55-year-old public service broadcaster operates 21 channels,<sup>vii</sup> including the international DD India. [3] Except for DD India and DD News, all the regional and national channels are mainly used by various ministries to generate awareness among target audiences about government schemes such as the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act.

In the early 1990s, with the arrival of cable and satellite channels, both Indian and foreign, viewers and advertisers began to get weaned off Doordarshan. The state-run broadcaster, until then a monopoly, was at a loss in a new, competitive environment that offered a variety of local and international content with high production standards.

Doordarshan was unable to spruce up the quality and delivery of its programmes to counter the burgeoning competition. [4] Gradually, its terrestrial or only-DD viewers-base, which once accounted for two-thirds of India's population, whittled down to less than 10% of rural homes,<sup>viii</sup> a sign that DD's terrestrial viewers have increasingly shifted to cable and satellite channels.<sup>ix</sup>

However, competition did eventually compel Doordarshan to reach out to the Indian diaspora. In March 1995 it launched DD World, an international channel to inform, educate, and entertain Indians in 146 countries. Indians in the U.S., Canada, Europe, and parts of Asia were able to access DD World on their cable network through the INTELSAT satellite, but viewership details are not readily available.\* In 2000, the channel was renamed DD International, and in 2002 it was re-branded DD India.

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<sup>vii</sup>DD has 21 channels of its own; its digital network also beams 38 other/private channels, including Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha TV.

<sup>viii</sup>As estimated by Kunal Dasgupta, former chief executive officer of Sony Entertainment Television, in an interview in August 2013.

<sup>ix</sup>From an interview with Jawhar Sircar, chief executive officer of Prasar Bharati in New Delhi in May 2013.

\*From an interview with Rathikant Basu, former director general of Doordarshan, in July 2013.

## **2.1 Prasar Bharati and autonomy**

Despite the global interest in India today, DD India has little brand equity within the country, and none outside.<sup>xi</sup> A part of the reason is that Doordarshan is run by Prasar Bharati, the state's public service broadcaster, which also oversees All India Radio (AIR).

Prasar Bharati has had a tumultuous existence since it was set up in 1997. Although the Prasar Bharati (Broadcasting Corporation of India) Act of 1990 ostensibly allowed Doordarshan and AIR to operate autonomously, in reality the government still controls the broadcasting agency. It remains answerable to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (I&B). The ministry provides funding and salaries, and assigns career diplomats to head the public service broadcaster.<sup>xii</sup>

Moreover, in 1997, Prasar Bharati signed a 15-year contract with American satellite service provider Intelsat Corp, formerly PanAmSat, to beam Doordarshan World in Europe and the U.S., even as the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) was offering the same service at half the cost. A corruption scandal, involving the then chief executive officer of Prasar Bharati, eventually resulted in the government terminating the Intelsat contract in 2010. [5]

DD India then started uplinking to ISRO's INSAT-4B satellite. The switch to INSAT saved costs, but it unfortunately shrank DD India's footprint from 146 countries to just 38.<sup>xiii</sup> [6] At present, Doordarshan has put on hold its plans of identifying a consulting agency for the global distribution of DD India, which can uplink the channel on multiple satellites with global beams to different regions. [7]

However, the success of this strategy was evident in 2013, when a group of Indian Canadians requested a DD link to stay informed about Indian news. The destination was beyond the reach

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<sup>xi</sup>Observation based on interviews with former Doordarshan officials.

<sup>xii</sup>From the interview with Jawhar Sircar, CEO, Prasar Bharati.

<sup>xiii</sup>The DD India website does not give a date for this figure. According to the Prasar Bharati annual report of 2010-2011, DD India reaches 89 countries. The exact current figure is unverifiable.

of INSAT-4B, and Doordarshan hooked on to double channels. It passed the DD India content to a satellite in West Asia which was linked to a Canadian channel.

Similar options are being explored in other countries. As part of the last mile connectivity, Doordarshan plans to make DD India available on various delivery platforms like direct-to-home cable and internet protocol TV in countries and regions with a sizeable Indian diaspora, such as the U.S., UK, West Asia, South Asia, and Australia. Local cable operators in all these locations will then be able to downlink DD India's programmes.

However, to ensure that viewers watch the channel, India will have to first publicise it by marketing DD India and its programmes in those countries. As of now, the channel is unable to gauge the number of viewers who watch DD India. Typically, local distributors in every country only give the number of households that subscribe to the channel, regardless of whether they actually watch it, shows research done in 2013 by Helios Media.<sup>xiv</sup> As a result, the number of households that receive a particular channel becomes a proxy for the number of viewers.

## **2.2 Doordarshan as a foreign policy medium**

In an age of proliferating social media and free-flowing information, New Delhi remains circumspect on geopolitical and strategic issues on its international channel; this prevents the channel from becoming a credible source of Indian perspectives.

Tales of missed opportunities abound. For example, in March 2011 India abstained from voting on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolution on a no-fly zone over Libya and on authorising the use of force in that country. India's then Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri, was vague about the reason for the abstention. He said that passing a resolution was an interactive exercise, and that the UK and France, the two countries leading the process, did not make the requisite effort to address India's concerns about the resolution. [8]

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<sup>xiv</sup>Helios Media is a Mumbai-based firm that offers speciality services to broadcasters.



Political experts globally either criticised India's abstention or hailed the move. In such a high-profile scenario as a global debate over a resolution on Libya, India could have utilised Doordarshan to create a better impression and pull other countries into its camp. This was a lost opportunity for India (then doing a two-year rotation at the UNSC from 2011-2013) to demonstrate how the country could contribute were it to become a permanent member of the Security Council.

Clearly, the world was looking for more from India. "Great powers have to make choices in international affairs—it's what makes them great powers," Daniel Twinning, senior fellow for Asia at the German Marshall Fund, and an associate of the U.S. National Intelligence Council, wrote on March 18, 2011, in *Foreign Policy*, commenting on the abstention. [9]

In February 2012, when India did vote in favour of the resolution on the no-fly zone over Libya, but said that the leadership of Syria was a matter for the Syrians to decide, DD barely covered this turnaround. [10] If DD India had a strong global footprint, it could have explained India's position and reasoning, and left a positive impression on the world stage despite its changing positions.

Subsequently, the privately-run media in India were caustic and dismissive of the country's diplomatic victories—such as the Food Security Agreement with the World Trade Organisation, and over the Jammu and Kashmir water dispute with Pakistan in December 2013—as luck rather than a grand strategy at work. [11, 12]

In fact, with no effective international channel at Doordarshan, it looked like India had outsourced the task of interpreting its foreign policy to the foreign media and to domestic private channels, which had little interest in external affairs. While New Delhi stayed silent, channels such as BBC and CNN began decoding India's actions from their own perspectives, thereby reinforcing existing biases.

This continues: with satellite television having put information on fast-forward, DD has not exactly been proactive in giving statements on world events at short notice. Even in 2014, private Indian and global broadcasters—including Al Jazeera, CCTV, and

Russia Today—which Indian homes can access, are gaining because of DD India’s lack of reach. In fact, a 2013 Ipsos Pax<sup>xv</sup> survey of international and local media consumption in Indian cities named BBC World News as India’s leading international English news channel, outperforming local English channels. [13]

To address the gaps and cover lost ground, in January 2013, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting set up a seven-member expert committee with technocrat Sam Pitroda at the helm, to revamp DD and AIR.<sup>xvi</sup> The committee reviewed Prasar Bharati’s mandate and its relationship with the government. [15] It submitted a report on January 23, 2014. This has led many to hope that DD India’s international broadcast and programming plans will soon make it a credible voice of Indian diplomacy and foreign policy.

## **2.3 Turning DD around**

On April 5, 2013, Manish Tewari, then Minister of Information and Broadcasting, gave the keynote address at a meeting in New Delhi of the expert committee on the restructuring of Prasar Bharati. He outlined the government’s plans for reforming Doordarshan: setting up an independent broadcasting authority, a social media bureau for Doordarshan, and the need to regulate content because as many as 450 private and state-owned news channels beam across India. [16]

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<sup>xv</sup> Ipsos Pax is a global media, content, and technology research house based in Hong Kong.

<sup>xvi</sup> The Sam Pitroda Committee followed various other committees set up to revamp Prasar Bharati, starting with the Nitish Sengupta Committee in 1995. Besides, in December 2005, the government also set up a Committee on Information, Communication and Entertainment. A sub-group submitted a detailed report to the main committee in June 2006 with recommendations for an International Affairs channel in the form of a public-private partnership. The channel could be part-funded by the government and set up through an Indian company/entity to function on professional lines. The sub-group essentially dealt with projecting India’s “soft power” by disseminating its cultural content abroad and projecting the country’s global presence. It recommended an outlay of Rs. 500 crores for the international channel during the 11<sup>th</sup> Plan period. The outcome of these recommendations is not clear. [14]

However, even under a state-mandated special broadcasting authority, DD India will remain answerable to the government. If Doordarshan is to take on a global role, it must be given autonomy. It should be run by professionals and not bureaucrats, whose short tenures do not leave time for institution-building and real long-term impact.

DD India already has a lot going for it, including:

- access to the largest number of TV-owning and cable and satellite households in India—234 million [17]
- government funding<sup>xvii</sup>
- early access to the schedules of government officials and ministers, with which DD can be ahead of private channels in preparing programmes and interviews

All this makes DD India potentially the most influential channel, which can create a deep and significant impact. It must now optimally utilise these advantages.

By becoming independent from the government, not only can Doordarshan rectify its image as a slothful entity, it will also be beneficial for the broadcaster to have the creative freedom to think out of the box. The government must have a strategy to use an autonomous DD India to India's advantage.

After years of following a standard programme menu without taking into account viewer sensibilities, the demand for state-run television in India has reached a plateau, except for the evening news slots. Advertisers will pay high rates for a television channel only if it has high viewership.

To ensure that the India story is compelling, the channel can showcase the country as taking a balanced, middle path on its journey as a developing economy; a country transiting even more rapidly from the traditional to the modern. The channel can also constructively reflect India's struggles, complications, and achievements in the economic, social, political, and geopolitical context.

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<sup>xvii</sup>In the I&B ministry's five-year Broadcast Plan that ended in March 2012, Prasar Bharati's expenditure was Rs. 11,000 crores. [18]

In doing so, the quality of content is critical for DD India to be able to make an imprint on global views and to make an impact on a global audience. The channel must step out of its conventional comfort zone of producing predictable fare and devise innovative programmes to attract viewers. It can be done only if DD India generates content with an Indian perspective skilfully combined with global appeal.

### **3. The way forward**

In April 2013, speaking at a meeting of the expert committee on restructuring Prasar Bharati, Sam Pitroda said the terms of reference for the committee focused on producing relevant content that is blended with the larger goal of nation-building. [19]

The renewed focus can include making DD India a channel that effectively portrays foreign policy to put India on the world broadcasting map. The programmes must be produced with the viewer in mind, to appeal to a diverse international audience. The channel can disseminate substantive and unbiased information about India and its neighbours in a way that enhances the broadcaster's credibility.

Prasar Bharati's CEO, Jawhar Sircar, who was the convenor of the committee, wants to build on the acceptance within India of the revamped DD News. It is now watched by viewers who seek news minus the frills of many private channels. [20] The international channel can draw a few lessons from this renewed appeal. However, barring the DD News package, the rest of Doordarshan retains a 1970s feel. To address this, updated presentation techniques and gloss in its international television programming are also necessary.<sup>xviii</sup>

Good programmes are enhanced by good technology. At a time when the competition is so intense, Doordarshan continues to grapple with outdated equipment, including decade-old cameras.<sup>xix</sup> In order to substantially increase viewership, generate more advertising revenue, and compete with private players,

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<sup>xviii</sup>Views expressed by strategic brand consultant Santosh Desai during a phone interview in June 2013.

<sup>xix</sup>From telephone interviews with DD staffers in May 2014.

DD India must, at the outset, invest in modern hardware to produce its programmes.

### **3.1 Human resources**

A revamped Doordarshan can deliver only if it has the right personnel. Unfortunately, promotions and hires across DD's assorted channels have been on hold for the past 15 years, while many of its better journalists left to join rival channels.

Doordarshan has no human resource policy or vision of what it wants to be, points out Mohandas Pai, the former chief financial officer of Infosys, who was on Pitroda's human resource committee to revamp Doordarshan. Former I&B minister Manish Tewari too highlighted this gap when, in February 2013, he said in the Lok Sabha that 6,186 posts were vacant in DD and 10,081 posts in AIR. [21]

As India rises in the world order, its voice will be heard only if DD India's plans hinge on building a strong cadre of good editors and proactive journalists, who can fan out across the globe to report. Since a channel is only as good as its correspondents, DD India can pick existing Doordarshan correspondents who are versatile, adaptable, and adventurous. It can also hire from outside and build an international team made up of 60% Indians and 40% international staffers. It can hire Indian expatriates *in situ* in countries like Fiji, and hire locals in West Asia and Africa, where India has business interests, along with some experienced hands from the local milieu.

At a time when global media houses have adopted integrated news operations across their media branches, Doordarshan too can integrate all its state-run media arms including television, radio (AIR), print,<sup>xx</sup> and digital to comprehensively present India. [22] Cross-media teams working on the same foot will save costs and create a greater impact. In fact, DD India on the web can eventually become the model for India to disseminate its foreign policy positions and perspectives on global events.

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<sup>xx</sup>Press Trust of India (PTI) and United News of India (UNI).

Al Jazeera English, the international channel which went on air in 2006, made headlines when it signed on well-known global anchors from established rivals, like Riz Khan from CNN and the late David Frost, former BBC host. Al Jazeera also hired the staff of BBC's Arabic channel in West Asia when BBC wound up operations in the region in 1996. In May 2013, Russia Today hired Larry King, the veteran American television host who was the face of CNN for decades. China's CCTV lured experienced Chinese American producers, journalists, anchors, and editors from rival channels for the launch of CCTV America in February 2012.

Now is the right time for DD India to make its renewed international debut for another reason: two of the largest global broadcasters—BBC and CNN—are cash-strapped; they have curtailed coverage and have pulled out correspondents from many locations worldwide. [23] It is an opportunity for DD India to step in and replace the authoritative opinion of foreign channels by voices from India and other emerging economies.

### **3.2 Bureaus and correspondents**

With limited resources, bureau-sharing arrangements will help optimise the field force and minimise cost. DD India can have bureaus in major cities like New Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bengaluru, and Chandigarh. It can share bureaus in cities like Amritsar (to cover Srinagar, Bhutan, and Nepal), and neighbouring countries can share bureaus.

As staff take up strategic positions in India, the channel can open bureaus and place correspondents across the globe. If the channel is good, DD India may also be able to hire locally on foreign soil.

**South Asia:** As a pivot point on Asia's geopolitical stage, the world wants to know about India's relations with its neighbours, particularly Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, and the reality of living next door to China. The withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan later in 2014 will be keenly-watched, and Doordarshan can cover it from India's perspective. DD India journalists can also be stationed in Colombo, Dhaka, Kathmandu, and Karachi. Colombo can cover Male, while Karachi can cover Kabul.

**Asia:** With Southeast Asian nations, including Japan, looking to India as a counter-weight to China, it is imperative for India to have a strong bureau in the region. A bureau in Singapore can cover Myanmar, Thailand, and Malaysia. Jakarta can be the headquarters covering the Philippines, Australia, and the South Pacific. A Tokyo bureau can oversee Korea and Taiwan, while a correspondent in Beijing can cover Shanghai.

**West Asia/North Africa:** India can ill afford to remain aloof from the transformative changes in its immediate and extended neighbourhood. West Asia is critical to India's burgeoning energy requirements, trade, and economic needs. This strategically important region accounts for the largest trade volumes for India, overtaking its trade with China. [24] Nearly 6 million Indians (the largest chunk of Indians overseas) are employed in the six Gulf Cooperation Council nations. [25]

The multiple dynamics of India's ties with the region can be covered by a strong bureau in West Asia. The Tehran bureau can cover Herat (Afghanistan), Balochistan, and Baghdad. The Abu Dhabi bureau can cover Dubai and Kuwait city. Cairo, Johannesburg, and Lagos can each have a reporter based in the region.

**Europe:** Since 2007, both India and the 28-nation European Union have been negotiating the Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement, which has encountered many hurdles. [26] Even so, the EU is India's largest trade and investment partner. A bureau in Berlin can cover Geneva and the UN; London and Moscow must have a full-time reporter each.

**Americas:** Latin America is an attractive export market for India and a source of much-needed raw materials and agricultural goods. In 2011-2012, India's trade with the region was more than \$28 billion. [27] Corporate India already has a strong foothold in Latin America and is looking to expand its operations and acquisitions in the region. The resource-rich region has crude oil, edible oil, and minerals, which constitute the three main items of India's imports. [28]

A roving reporter stationed in Rio de Janeiro can cover South America, while a journalist in New York can also take charge of Canada.

All the bureaus can work with the Indian Ministry of External Affairs and network with the expatriate Indian business community, which could open doors to contacts and story ideas. The bureaus can also work with local businesses, and local and Indian think tanks, to report for DD-run television, internet and social media such as Twitter, and the journalists can also blog.

### **3.3 Content**

Once the backend is in place—including signing up with assorted global distribution carriers in different countries for cable, direct-to-home, internet protocol television, and terrestrial platforms—DD India can focus on the key aspects of delivering its services: international production standards and high quality content.

The scope of the content and programming can be widened to appeal to a local as well as global audience, particularly in the developing world. If India's voice is to be heard internationally, DD India must host weekly programmes on foreign policy. Its private counterparts already have such slots: for example, NDTV has *International Agenda* and CNN-IBN has the weekly *World View*. Even Lok Sabha TV and Rajya Sabha TV (which are answerable to Parliament) telecast topical foreign policy programmes.

More importantly, to gain viewers, DD India must broadcast India's specialities or the many dimensions of "incredible" India: indigenous medicine, history, culture, traditional and modern businesses and businesspersons, and ancient and modern science. These topics can uniquely showcase India. For example, DD India could have made the series on the National Defence Academy depicting the transformation of cadets into future officers of the Indian armed forces; instead, it was premiered on Republic Day 2014 by Discovery Channel.

Doordarshan's international channel can also allot slots for showcasing successful social sector schemes of the central and state governments in India. Programmes that portray the challenges and limitations of democracy will also attract audiences worldwide: countries aspiring to adopt democracy will be able to draw on India's experience.



There are lessons to be learnt from programmes on social initiatives in other countries, such as Brazil's Bolsa Familia project<sup>xxi</sup> for education and health. The One Village, One Product movement<sup>xxii</sup> in Japan to energise the rural economy will also resonate in India's heartland. DD India can telecast shows on such initiatives and produce programmes about similar Indian movements. Even lessons from Mahatma Gandhi's teachings—including his views on capitalism and responsible business practices—will have a global appeal. [29]

Doordarshan can draw lessons from the success of Lok Sabha TV and Rajya Sabha TV,<sup>xxiii</sup> which are generating revenues. They are owned and operated by Parliament. It is mandatory for these channels to telecast advertising only from the government and public sector agencies.

In the 2012-13 fiscal year, Lok Sabha TV's profit was Rs. 7 crores on revenues of Rs. 16 crores from advertising, according to Rajiv Mishra, CEO of Lok Sabha TV. [30] Varying strategies for different time slots gives the channel the flexibility to mix and match programmes, Mishra says,<sup>xxiv</sup> but the programming has to be relevant to the target audience. There are plans to launch the channel in three different languages.

DD India can also develop programmes specifically for the SAARC region, Central Asia, West Asia, and BRICS countries. If presented and packaged well, these too will be of interest to a wide section of viewers.

The scope for hard-hitting documentaries and talk shows about our neighbours is as yet untapped and immense, though foreign broadcasters have featured such films for years. NDTV too had a

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<sup>xxi</sup>The *Bolsa Familia* programme is a cash transfer initiative started by the Brazilian government in 2003, aimed at reducing poverty and getting families to invest in their children.

<sup>xxii</sup>The *One Village, One Product* movement, started in 1979 in Japan, was aimed at increasing the per capita income of the people in Oito Prefecture.

<sup>xxiii</sup>Lok Sabha TV, set up in 2006, telecasts live proceedings of the Lower House of Parliament; Rajya Sabha TV was set up in 2011 to telecast live proceedings of the Upper House of Parliament.

<sup>xxiv</sup>Interview with Rajiv Mishra, CEO, Lok Sabha TV, in May 2013.

slot called Documentary 24x7 for showcasing the work of various filmmakers on contemporary issues. Documentaries as a genre can add heft to DD India's programming and embellish the country's image. Twice a week, the channel can allot 30-minute slots for some of the best documentaries.

In 2013, the U.S.-based History channel's India slot featured *Tamas*, director Govind Nihalani's docu-drama series on Partition. DD India too could screen the series around Independence day on August 15. Veteran director Shyam Benegal's mini-series, *Samvidhaan*, on the making of the Indian Constitution, was produced and aired on Rajya Sabha TV in March 2014. It too will find an interested audience on DD India.

DD India can focus on features and shared lessons on the following:

- **Regional blocs:** Stories on BRICS, South Asia, ASEAN, and the West—all with a non-western perspective—will be well-received. For example, talk shows analysing elections, highlighting state interventions in natural disasters and disaster management (solution-based coverage), including gritty stories on local communities; and programmes on democracy and nation-building. These will have takeaways for countries grappling with social inequality as well as for India.
- **Entrepreneurship:** There is always a demand for “how to” stories and features on social enterprise. Interesting case studies of the achievements of people and organisations in various geographies can be highlighted. International and traditional finance can be covered in innovative ways.
- **Technology:** DD India can showcase the latest and most sophisticated trends in India and the world, which have made a difference to people's lives. For example, interesting case studies of World Bank projects are available and can be shown. A documentary, for example, on how technology contributed to making the government in Moldova accountable to its citizens, will resonate with many audiences. [31] As will a documentary on how a simple technology, when interlinked with science, helped contain malaria and child mortality in Africa. [32]

- **Medicine/healthcare:** DD India can portray the latest trends in the field, besides documenting groups and individuals working on simple applications that cover a larger population. For example, a story on the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's toilet-tech fair in New Delhi in March 2014 to address global sanitation issues, will attract global viewers. [33] Such programmes involve not just covering an event, but also tracking the trend and highlighting innovations that can be replicated in different countries.
- **Globalisation issues:** These can be a big draw for DD India. A long-running show depicting the impact of mechanisation on labour in different geographies, and how people are coping, will be relevant and interesting for viewers.
- **Education:** While the big education stories are covered by the mainstream media, interesting changes are also occurring beyond the camera's lens. Teach for India<sup>xxv</sup> projects, for example, will resonate with global viewers.
- **Global agencies:** Occasional programmes on the role and impact of well-known agencies such as the United Nations, the World Health Organisation, and the Asian Development Bank will interest viewers. A fortnightly or monthly series on how some of these entities are making a difference across sectors can make for absorbing viewing.
- **Youth:** Young people constitute 17% of the world's population; of these 87% live in developing countries. [34] Nearly 73 million youthworldwidewereunemployedin2013. [35] Such stark numbers can be a wellspring from which DD India can develop shows on youth issues. The channel can produce programmes on the empowerment of young people in rural areas in various countries, or depict how countries with huge unemployed youth populations are devising innovative ways to handle the issue.
- **Wildlife:** DD India may never be able to compete with channels such as National Geographic, Discovery, and Animal Planet, but it can cover unusual stories about wildlife from across the world. In

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<sup>xxv</sup>Teach for India is a non-governmental organisation in six Indian cities, which equips educators with resources for a multicultural education.

India, for example, a programme on the impact of a change in habitat focusing on the controversy over shifting Gir lions from the overcrowded forests in Gujarat to Madhya Pradesh, will have global appeal. As will a feature on how the number of elephants and rhinoceroses are dwindling due to poachers, who kill the animals for the international trade in ivory and horns.

- **Travel:** If executed well, a travel show that takes viewers on a journey through India's beautiful and offbeat destinations, and introduces them to the country's culture, history, sights and sounds, will attract viewers. For example, the government is building a Buddhist trail for tourists, and a programme on this will appeal to many people across the world. Such stories will not only bring in viewers, they can also potentially boost tourism.

With brand salience and good content, DD India is well placed to become the definitive channel to portray the country globally.

### **3.4 Programming**

At a time when foreign channels are extending their global repertoire with country-specific programming, Doordarshan too must prioritise content and build a substantive programme base. To widen its appeal, DD India can be positioned as a window to India and a primary source of information for the world.

#### **a. Scheduling**

##### **On weekdays:**

- News updates every four hours, with a running ticker, the impact of the current news, and comments from various constituencies. This will help viewers, both Indian and international, to stay up-to-date with the latest news and general information.
- Many Indian channels often ignore the breakfast slot. Good breakfast shows have a feel-good factor. If done well in a light, chatty manner, including a good bonus interview with a "guest of the day," it can be a great start to a long telecast day ahead.
- Evening prime time: Doordarshan knows the importance of prime time. DD News, which was revamped in 2013, managed to

draw viewers away from established private channels for a while. DD India too must telecast news, serious discussions, and critical commentary on the latest Indian and international events and topics. It can feature panellists relevant to local markets. In all slots, it is important that DD India keeps its content topical and updated.

- Foreign direct investment is critical to the economy and *India Biz* can be a one-hour programme every week targeting business people in India and globally. The show can cover India's financial markets, with hard-hitting interviews and insights by Indian and foreign analysts on market developments. It can include a half-hour capsule aimed at anyone who wants to do business in India: they can be informed of the government's latest policies and regulations on the economy and about investment opportunities. The show can also highlight some of the challenges of doing business in India and how they can be overcome.

### **Over weekends:**

- An India news update every four hours, with a running ticker.
- Features and documentaries must be a key aspect of weekend programming. These genres have the potential to cover a range of diverse areas such as news, Bollywood, entrepreneurship, business, finance, innovation, and rural India. The features slot can include maths contests, a global general knowledge quiz, and shows on cooking, culture, yoga and meditation. Programmes on social harmony can also be positioned here, as well as on topics such as the growth of philanthropy in India.

### **b. Language**

A global channel is relevant only if it is in an international language. International channels such as China's CCTV, France 24, Al Jazeera, and Russia Today are in English. To be viewed globally, DD India can also be in English, with English voiceovers for documentaries and programmes in all other languages. A good documentary in an unfamiliar language can be compelling with subtitles and voiceovers.

At the same time, diaspora languages can be tools of diplomacy for DD India's region-specific programmes. For instance, Tamil programmes can be beamed to the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka, as well as Colombo, which has a large Tamil population. They can also be telecast in Geneva, Toronto, London, and Sydney, which too have Sri Lankan and Indian Tamil immigrants. Punjabi shows, films, and news can reach out to viewers in North America, Europe, Australia, Canada, and South Africa, which have a substantial concentration of Punjabis and Sikhs.

DD India can also cultivate viewers among groups that speak other Indian languages, and among diasporas from other South Asian countries. The channel could gradually introduce shows in Bengali and Hindi for the sub-continent.

### **c. Using Bollywood to build audiences**

International channels like CNN use Hollywood stars to anchor documentaries focussing on important issues. Demi Moore, for example, narrated and anchored an hour-long documentary on the 2010 CNN *Hero of the Year*, Anuradha Koirala, and the problem of trafficking of girls in Nepal, in June 2011. [36] Oscar-winner Marisa Tomei made her directorial debut by chronicling the harrowing story of an Ethiopian rape victim. These are stories from newspaper columnist Nicholas Kristof's 2009 book, *Half the Sky*. [37]

The book also features a couple of gritty Indian women, who are worthy of a documentary. DD India can use India's popular film stars to make programmes that communicate the country's message to the world, or highlight issues in South Asia.

### **d. Showcasing business**

DD-India can showcase fascinating stories of Indian businessmen, which will make for compelling viewing. For example, a show on the rise of Accenture as a part of India's software story can tell the world about doing business in India.

### **e. Monetising archives**

Although Doordarshan has a rate card for archived material

in various categories (including documentaries, features, and news clips), it can enhance accessibility and also monetise the archives of the best of Indian music, dance, and cinema by allowing other channels, filmmakers and advertising agencies to use them for a fee. [38]

### **3.5 Business model**

Some of the business models that Doordarshan can consider are:

- i. The government of India can continue to be the main benefactor of Doordarshan, but DD must robustly tap private advertising globally and locally (from wherever it airs). It can also look at alternative sources of funding, including corporate foundations. A compelling programme package which attracts viewers will ensure advertisers.
- ii. Public service broadcasters globally have a cautious relationship with the government. Doordarshan could follow the BBC model, which is answerable to a special committee of Parliament and not to the British government. Replicating the BBC model will ensure the smooth running of the Indian channel.
- iii. A public service broadcaster is usually funded, by law, through the licence fee levied on radio and television sets. This makes the entity accountable to tax payers and duty-bound to offer high quality programming.<sup>xxvi</sup>
- iv. India can formulate a home-grown public-private partnership model. The Ministry of External Affairs could have a limited role in running the channel. DD India and Doordarshan can be separate entities. DD India can have a professional chief executive and executives hired from the private sector worldwide. The ministry could give some of the funds to run the channel, while the rest can come from advertising and sponsorships.
- v. Doordarshan has various unutilised assets, including outdated studios and real estate, which it can monetise (according to a

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<sup>xxvi</sup>In June 2014, Prakash Javdekar, the new I&B minister of state, said that he believes his ministry is not needed in a democracy. He later clarified that the ministry will not be scrapped and nor will Prasar Bharati be given completely autonomy. [39]

former director general of DD who was interviewed for this report). Instead of investing in new studios, DD can hire independent studios, or barter with existing local studio spaces. Measures such as these will reduce costs and the savings can be used to improve the content and production quality of shows. In a way, DD India will be able to replicate the low-cost, high-quality model which has been a hit in India's healthcare and software industries.

### **3.6 Distribution**

DD India can share satellite space with other broadcasters by sharing advertising revenues. It must also ensure that the entire backend chain is in place, particularly uplinking, downlinking, and distribution pacts. It can seek help from India's embassies and diplomatic personnel to ensure that the channel is telecast without local glitches.

DD India must be the entry point channel at hotels and airports, an avenue that private channels have successfully exploited. A combination of interesting and relevant content, including a quick recapitulation of the day's political and business news, and high production values are effective hooks for transiting and waiting travellers.

Content available on-demand can be distributed through the internet on tablets and cell phones through the 4G spectrum.

### **4. Conclusion**

As India grows and assumes a larger role in world affairs, it will become even more necessary for the country to showcase its profile and project its actions and achievements in the context of democracy, culture, governance, research, business, and civil society. For this, DD India can be the most effective medium.

However, to become a powerful international medium of communication for India, Doordarshan will have to make structural as well as substantive changes. A change in the reporting structure will allow Prasar Bharati to function more autonomously and creatively. The revitalised DD India must



project a modern face. If viewers are to be won over, it is critical to be consistent about the quality of programming and production values across time slots throughout the day. Highly-qualified professionals must be hired. Experienced correspondents working for DD India globally will add an identifiable voice and standard to the channel.

To project India's voice globally, the government must shed its habitual attitude of secrecy. This will require people in the government to part with information and actively participate in programmes and debates.

Over time, DD India must aim to become an eager contributor to the global conversation on topics that are not just relevant to Indians but also to people in other countries. It should be quick on its feet to respond to various events around the world.

With these and the other measures outlined in this report, Doordarshan has the potential to become the definitive voice of India's foreign policy as well as of its views on global issues; it can be the vehicle for a rich and layered narrative about an evolving and growing India.

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