

Free Prasar Bharati from Govt Control

The appointment of Sam Pitroda as head of a high-level committee to suggest measures to make Doordarshan and Akashvani more popular seems to be an exercise in futility. Bringing the two under Prasar Bharati, an 'autonomous' body, was an attempt to liberate them from the government's control. Far from that, they remained firmly under the control of the government. Today Prasar Bharati accounts for two-thirds of the information and broadcasting ministry's annual budget. With the popularity of Doordarshan and All India Radio decreasing year by year, Prasar Bharati is increasingly becoming a white elephant. The recommendations of the Sengupta, Bakshi and Narayana-murthy committees, which had earlier studied the functioning of Prasar Bharati, remain unimplemented. That is why Pitroda's appointment does not instil confidence.

Any news organisation, which is directly under the government, and has to take orders from the government functionaries, whether political or bureaucratic, will not carry conviction with the people. The Prasar Bharati experiment has turned out to be a complete failure. Since the corporation draws money from the government and its officials are drawn from government cadre, it cannot exercise even a semblance of autonomy. It is no better than an adjunct of the government.

As long as Prasar Bharati remains tied to the government, there is no redemption for the organisation. The British Broadcasting Corporation provides an example of how a public service broadcaster can be run. Instead of drawing money directly from the government, a licence fee can be collected from all owners of television receivers, as is done in the case of motor vehicles, to run Prasar Bharati. Until the Seventies, the government used to collect a radio fee. Liberated from government dependence and staffed by professionals, Prasar Bharati should be able to show greater professionalism in both production and presentation of programmes. It can also set standards for the ever-increasing private radio and television channels.