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From March, broadcast 15 hours of monthly national interest content: Govt to channels

The recent guidelines for uplinking and downlinking of television channels included a requirement for private broadcasters to undertake public service broadcasting for 30 minutes every day, based on certain themes given by the ministry.

Written by **Divya A**

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The content can be shared between the broadcasters and a repeat telecast on one or several channels is also allowed now. (Representational/File)

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Beginning March, all private television channels will be required to air national interest content for 15 hours every month. A detailed advisory to this effect was issued by the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting Monday.

The recent guidelines for uplinking and downlinking of television channels included a requirement for private broadcasters to undertake public service **broadcasting for 30 minutes every day**, based on certain themes given by the ministry. In this regard, the ministry undertook extensive consultations with the private broadcasters and their associations. Based on their inputs, an advisory was issued on January 30, it said in a statement.

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With the advisory, the ministry has clarified that the national interest content can be embedded in the programmes being telecast, and that the content need not be of 30 minutes at a stretch. The public service broadcast can be split over smaller time slots, but can't be done from midnight to 6 am, the ministry said.

The broadcasters are also required to keep the record of the content telecast for a period of 90 days. The Electronic Media Monitoring Centre, under I&B Ministry, shall keep the record of the content telecast for a period of 90 days, the advisory said. The government requires the broadcasters to submit a monthly report online on the Broadcast Seva Portal.

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The content can be shared between the broadcasters and a repeat telecast on one or several channels is also allowed now. In fact, a digital repository of relevant videos or textual content for the purpose may be developed, the advisory said, which may be accessed and used by TV channels.

The ministry has also added to eight themes included in the uplinking/downlinking policy document — education and literacy; agriculture and rural development; health and family welfare; science and technology; welfare of women; welfare of the weaker sections of the society; protection of environment and of cultural heritage; and national integration.

The scope of prescribed themes has also been expanded. “The list of themes of national importance and of social relevance given under clause 35 of the Policy Guidelines are indicative and may be expanded to include similar subjects of national importance and social relevance such as water conservation, disaster management, etc,” the advisory said.

The condition applies to all channels, except those mentioned specifically as exempt, where this may not be feasible. These include wildlife channels and foreign channels, besides live telecast in case of sports channels.

Channels broadcasting more than 12 hours of devotional/spiritual/yoga content are exempt from furnishing monthly reports.

An explanation will be sought from channels found to be non-compliant, officials said. The rationale behind the move, as per the government, is that airwaves are public property and need to be used in the best interest of society. Representatives of several broadcasters, however, had pointed out that while airwaves may be public property, they had paid hefty fees for their use, and any binding guidelines can affect their commercial interests.

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