**Doordarshan turns 60: The advent of Golden age in Indian television**

Doordarshan, inspired by the idea of uniting families in the living room to watch the daily Samachar or the evening shows, catered to all audiences alike

By [Express Web Desk](https://indianexpress.com/agency/express-web-desk/) |New Delhi |Updated: September 15, 2019 12:05:00 pm

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Doordarshan cultivated on the idea of families uniting in the living room to watch the daily *Samachar* or the evening shows

India’s first public service broadcaster Doordarshan is celebrating its 60th anniversary Sunday. Founded in 1959, Doordarshan paved the way for the Golden age in Indian television.

Advertising

Doordarshan, inspired by the idea of uniting families in the living room to watch the daily *Samachar* or the evening shows, catered to all audiences alike with its evolving number of TV shows — from regional and general entertainment to news and sports. Over time, it expanded to other countries and is free of cost on cable and satellite TV for smooth and universal accessibility.



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**Doordarshan and its iconic logo**

Its logo, said to symbolise the human eye, has preserved the nostalgia associated with the Doordarshan brand. Early this year, the state-owned broadcaster began the process of replacing the logo which it has been using since 1959. Doordarshan, which runs 23 channels across the country, floated a logo design contest, the winner of which will get a cash prize of Rs 1 lakh.

The move is seen as a part of the broadcaster’s bid to modernise and revamp its network.

**Humble beginnings**

Advertising

In 1959, inside the studios of the All India Radio, Doordarshan began as an experimental broadcast, with a small transmitter and a makeshift studio. Six years later, in 1965, Pratima Puri read out the first five-minute-long news bulletin. She also went on to interview Yuri Gagarin, the first man to travel into outer space.

Pratima Puri reading the news bulletin

Until then, all the regular daily transmissions were operated by the All India Radio.

On 15 August 1982, Doordarshan introduced a national telecast service from its own TV studio in New Delhi, named DD1. The same year, audiences saw the LIVE colour telecast of then Prime Minister [Indira Gandhi](https://indianexpress.com/about/indira-gandhi)’s speech on Independence Day. It was followed by the colour telecast of the 1982 Asian Games in Delhi.

Many a career were launched on this platform, and many shows went on to become classics. Entertainment shows like *Tu Tu main main*, *Mahabharat*, *Dekh Bhai Dekh*, *Udaan*, *Fauji*, *Malgudi Days* etc captured the imagination of the Indian public, in the late 80s and early 90s.

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*Chaupaal, Samachar*, and *Kalyani* were the first programs on the channel.

DD also produced *Krishi Darshan*, the longest-running TV show on agriculture that first aired in 1967 and broadcast to 80 villages. In 2014, it came up with Kisan TV, a dedicated agri-television channel to replace the popular show.

**Issue of institutional autonomy**

In the decades predating the 90s, Doordarshan, like the All India Radio, came under the government control. It was guaranteed institutional autonomy in the early 90s when the issue was raised in the Parliament and a legislation was passed that the public broadcaster should be autonomous.

The Prasar Bharati Act was subsequently passed in 1997to create what is known as the broadcasting corporation of India.

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The issue of institutional anonymity of Doordarshan clashes with its hybrid nature. When Prasar Bharati was created,  all the assets of Doordarshan and AIR was handed over to the corporation, but since it doesn’t come under the ambit of the Companies act, Prasar Bharti was not technically a corporation.

“So it is a statutory autonomous body. All of the employees of DD and AIR continued to remain employees of the Government of India (after its handover to Prasar Bharti). You have this hybrid model where the corporate is autonomous but everyone working within it are the employees of the govt. So it’s a very unique situation,” Its CEO Shashi Shekhar Vempati writes.

Ahead of the Lok Sabha elections this year, political coverage on its network raised the eyebrows of the Election Commission after it was revealed that the [BJP](https://indianexpress.com/about/bjp/) got the most airtime on DD News and its regional channels, followed by the Congress.

The Commission had sought a report from the channel on the coverage provided to all political parties after the opposition Congress, in its complaint to the poll panel, alleged that DD News is giving preferential treatment to the ruling BJP.

**Doordarshan today**

With the rapid growth of Indian television industry, the Doordarshan has faced somewhat of a setback. The economic reforms of 1991, and the liberalised access to communication technology, allowed foreign and Indian media companies entry into television.

There are now over [**800 licensed channels**](https://indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/television/the-world-came-home-2932048/) — there was one in 1991 —  catering to millions of viewers. The first 24×7 news channel began in 1998; by 2014 there were 400 and counting in more than 15 languages.

Despite the challenges, Doordarshan continues to live on. Early this year, India signed an agreement with Bangladesh to[**telecast the state-run DD India in the neighbouring country.**](https://indianexpress.com/article/india/dd-india-telecast-in-bangladesh-south-korea-prakash-javadekar-5789011/) It was also decided that Prasar Bharati would co-produce a feature film directed by Shyam Benegal on the life of the founding father of Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, and a documentary on Bangladesh Liberation War