

CONTENT SLOT: THE HINDU EDITORIAL ON GUIDELINES FOR OPERATION OF TELEVISION CHANNELS

Relevant for: null | Topic: Media and Culture

Tweaking guidelines for television channels operating in India, the Union Cabinet has laid down some norms on content as well. In the time of polarising opinions, heated debates and narrow targeting of ideas on television, it said wherever applicable, the channels would have to broadcast content on themes of national importance and [socially relevant issues](#) for at least 30 minutes every day. The '[Guidelines for Uplinking and Downlinking of Satellite Television Channels in India, 2022](#)' point out that as airwaves and frequencies are public property and need to be used in the best interest of society, a company with permission to operate in India, barring foreign channels, will have to air content in the service of the public. The themes that have been picked out include education and spread of literacy, agriculture and rural development, health and family welfare, science and technology, welfare of women and weaker sections of society, protection of environment and of cultural heritage and national integration. These are subjects on which a lot more awareness is necessary. According to a FICCI-EY report, with television subscriptions estimated to add another 42 million by 2025 from 178 million in 2021, on the face of it, the public service broadcast is not a bad idea in a diverse country with myriad issues.

The good intent, however, comes with a caveat. The guidelines say "the Central Government may, from time to time, issue a general advisory to the channels for telecast of content in national interest, and the channel shall comply with the same". Though the Government has left it to the channels to "appropriately modulate their content to fulfil the obligation", its stated intention to step in as and when required may be another way to signal that it will keep a watchful eye on the media. In its 2008 recommendations, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India had suggested a public service obligation, which the Information and Broadcasting (I&B) Ministry has taken on board. But there is no clarity yet on compensation norms and who is going to foot the bill for the public service component on TV. The guidelines, with effect from November 9, replace those in operation since 2011 with the Government announcing a host of measures which include making India a teleport hub. The Government has done away with the requirement to seek permission for live telecast of events; only prior registration of events will be necessary for live telecast. As for the 30-minute public service slot, I&B Secretary Apurva Chandra has said stakeholders will be consulted regarding the modalities, which will have to be sorted out.

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