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Infighting in Prasar Bharati puts I&B ministry in a spot

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New Delhi: With internal strife in the Prasar Bharati board proving to be a public embarrassment that refuses to go away, the I&B ministry is caught in a bind. While it is not legally empowered to effect any changes in Prasar Bharati, the ministry is concerned that bringing in a legislation to amend the PB Act may also not serve its purpose.

At the heart of the matter is the power that the public broadcaster — that controls Doordarshan and All India Radio — wields and its influence over public opinion for the government of the day. Sources in the ministry said while a bill amending the ex-

isting Act has been ready for some time now, there are concerns that it may not pass muster in Parliament. The bill gives the government a, one-time waiver to scrap the entire board and elect a new one. The legislation has received

CAUGHT IN A BIND

law ministry's support and I&B minister Ambika Soni had even submitted a report to PM Manmohan Singh in September giving an overview of the allegations and counter-allegations that board members have laid on each other.

Sources, however, said getting the amendments cleared would prove to be difficult without the political support

to carry it through. The legislation could shift the debate from the inefficiency and corruption that ails the pubcaster to the government's attempt at undermining the authority of an autonomous organisation. "The bill would have to be sent to a parliamentary committee and could delay any decision on the board by months, if not longer," a source said.

It is learnt that the government is seized of the matter and would like to see the board resign on its own. However, there are obstacles to this as certain members are unwilling to take the plunge. Prasar Bharati has been mired in controversy with the matter reaching the Delhi HC.