

INTERVIEW ARUNA SHARMA, DIRECTOR-GENERAL, DOORDARSHAN

'I want to transform DD into a premier entertainment & news broadcaster'

Hoping to cash in on the upcoming Commonwealth Games (CWG) telecast coverage, Aruna Sharma, director-general, Doordarshan, is aiming for a makeover. In a candid chat with FE's Ashish Sinha, she shares glimpses of her vision for transforming Doordarshan from a procedure-centric entity to an outcome driven premier entertainment and news broadcaster in the next few years. Excerpts:

Have you signed a deal with SIS Live of the UK for high definition (HD) coverage of Commonwealth Games? If so, why is it taking time?

Everything has been sorted out. The deal should be inked in a day or two. Some administrative changes and approvals and consultations are required. SIS Live will handle the production coverage of the Games and train 300 Doordarshan staffers. Let me underline that financials of the SIS contract have not changed.

How are you planning to leverage the Games?

We will have a dedicated HD channel—DD India—that will carry the feed of CWG in HD format. The HD channel will be available on DD Direct Plus, our free-to-air DTH service. The coverage will also be available in standard definition formats. We are in talks with cable operators in Delhi and Mumbai who



have promised to upgrade their cable infrastructure to carry DD's HD channel on their network. Consumers of DD Direct Plus will be required to buy a higher-end set top box to enjoy the HD transmission of CWG.

The general perception of Doordarshan is not positive. How will you change it?

Yes, one tends to find a lot of negative reporting on Doordarshan. And, most are speculative. We are made to look as parasites living off government money which is not the case. This year, we will show through our accounts that our earnings are far more than what the government provides us. In fact, I am sure Doordarshan earnings in the current fiscal will be more than what it may have clocked in the last five years. Some of our en-

tertainment shows are among the most watched in the country. Doordarshan will have to take fast decisions.

Can you share some financial numbers of Doordarshan for this fiscal?

I will provide detailed accounts in April. But from a January (2009) to January (2010) comparison, we may have crossed earnings of Rs 1,000 crore. In the current fiscal, we should outdo the record of Rs 947 crore earnings generated five years ago. There are several heads within Doordarshan that are not at all accounted for. I am putting them together (like the earnings from DD Direct Plus DTH). However, even without them, we should report higher earnings.

But criticism of Doordarshan is rooted in its functioning. For instance, there are no takers for its tenders on global distribution. What do you have to say on this?

Yes, I am aware of that (tenders have come out twice). If we have to function as a media company, which Doordarshan is, we will have to focus on the outcome rather than procedures. We are good in bringing out tenders and meticulous paperwork but the desired results are not achieved. I would like to change that in due course. When we air entertainment shows, they compete for eyeballs with all other private channels. Why can't they compete for advertising business too?