

Keynote Address by Mr. S. K. Arora

Secretary, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, Govt. of India

Hon'ble Minister for Information & Broadcasting and Parliamentary Affairs, Chairman of Prasar Bharati, Chief Executive Officer of Prasar Bharati, Secretary General of Commonwealth, Secretary General of Commonwealth Broadcasting Association, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen. Let me first of all add my own words of welcome to all of you to India and to Delhi and I hope that you will have a very fruitful, productive and enjoyable stay in India. While you are here, I am sure you will see the sights and sounds of India and also the technical quality and content of our broadcasting networks in India. We feel great pride in our broadcasting network and broadcasting companies and I am sure we will do our very best to showcase the latest and the state of the art in this field in India. Recent trends in the Indian broadcasting scene have shown tremendous growth both in terms of coverage as well as in terms of commercial parameters. Both, television and broadcasting, in particular Prasar Bharati, being the public broadcaster have almost covered the whole of the country 95 to 98 % in television and radio coverage in this country in terms of population and even the private channels have not been far behind. They have also extended their coverage and today, we have over hundred and seventy channels, private channels uplink from India. In addition, we have more than a hundred channels that are being fed into India from abroad. On the radio scene also while Prasar Bharati that is Doordarshan on the television side and Akashvani or All India Radio on the radio side have been the monopoly service providers for decades, but in the last 5-7 years, in the case of Television, from 1990 onwards and in the case of Radio, from 2000 onwards, private sector has started making their contribution and have proliferated considerably. The recent development of Radio has been phenomenal. We started in 2001 with just about 20 odd FM channels, FM radio channels in the private sector. We have recently modified our policy in 2005, liberalised it, made it more attractive, made it revenue sharing format which has enabled tremendous enthusiasm to be generated amongst the private entrepreneurs and I am very happy to share with you that in the month of Jan. last month, 2006, we have actually allocated 280 new private FM radio channels across 90 cities in the country and we have plans to take it forward to other cities in the country. This 90 is where certain amount of infrastructure was available in terms of towers for co-location of these radio stations in Prasar Bharati, but we now propose to take it in the next phase to other cities where may be co-location facilities would be provided shortly and therefore, the number will enhance from 300 to may be much more. We have also introduced community radio stations and we have roughly 20 stations, which are now operational and many more are in the pipeline. We are also modifying our policy further liberalizing the community radio policy and we hope that with that there will be further expansion of community radio, really the way to go as far as communities to air their views and also

participate in the community activities at the local level. From a policy making prospective I would like to share some of the recent developments in the Indian broadcasting scenario. As I mentioned the development of Television and radio, particularly television has been largely in the last 15 years in the private sector and this development has been although regulated to some extent channelized to some extent but has been largely unregulated. Technology, which rapidly changes, has always out past regulatory regimes and in India, we were liberal enough to permit on players to come in, whether Indian or foreign, to provide the necessary service for Indian viewers and listeners and that is why there was a huge proliferation of private television channels in India, particularly on the cables and satellite networks. But this also had its own toll in terms of adversarial commercial relations that developed between the broadcasters and the cable operators on the one side and the consumers feeling a little feels about not having enough options available to them in terms of ground coverage by cable operators. And therefore, government has been moving towards finding solutions to this problem of adversarial relationships and has made efforts to bring about regulations to overcome these difficulties and some of the highlights of those regulations have been in terms of the up-linking guidelines that we introduced in 2000, to cover broadcasting companies. We have recently introduced for foreign channels setup, being beamed into India for management and operation of such down-linking such companies in India and regulation of their content particularly. We have also looked at the role, which Prasar Bharati has been playing in the past several years. Starting from the position of pre eminence and monopoly, which Prasar Bharati enjoyed, both in Radio and Television from 1990 onwards, its role has become that of a competitor. And yet Prasar Bharati has continued to play in a very responsible and resilient manner. Its role, its primary function of providing Public service broadcasting to the nation and this role at no cost has been compromised in any way as far as India is concerned and Prasar Bharati continues to be the main proponent of Public Service Broadcasting in our country. But technology private enterprise have brought in many platforms and as you know more and more convergence is taking place on various platforms, whether it is telecommunication platforms, mobile telephony, internet or cable operations and using all latest state of the art technologies for carrying content in different ways in different platforms to the consumers and to the viewers. And this has certainly led to a whole lot of soul searching in terms of defining different platforms in term from defining who is a broadcaster, who is a platform, who is a carrier, who is a content provider and we are struggling. And we propose to take all this forward through a proposed broadcasting regulation act that will codify all our guidelines; that we have evolved over the last 10 years or so and give them legislative backing and also refine and define various parameters; based on which broadcasting sector would be regulated in the times to come. It would also set up a broadcasting regulator, its own, as of now the telecom regulators has been assigned responsibility in India and we hope to have our own broadcasting regulator that will do both convergence of services in terms of regulation of the content as well as regulation of the carriage platforms which are related to broadcasting sector. Where there is no broadcasting involved then there would be obviously the telecom regulator that will take care of

that and we want to differentiate quite clearly when content is carried on a platform and who will regulate that content and if the platform alone is different than the content regulators will regulate the content part irrespective of the platform on which it is carried. So we are trying to distinguish and hopefully in the legislation that we proposed to bring out, this distinction would be highlighted and would be defined quite adequately. We also tend, have also looked at content from a more liberal perspective than is traditionally understood. In India we have been very open, India is a very open society and an open economy and everyone is welcome. Whether it is in terms of foreign investment or in terms of foreign products, including broadcasting products, including content. Although we have limited obligations under the world trade services agreement, our autonomous regulations go far beyond our international obligations and almost very little restriction has been placed on the import of content into our country. And yet we find that our content regulation have been extremely liberal and we propose to take this freedom of expression even further by introducing legislation which would include mechanisms for self regulation and self certification by the broadcasting industry. And because it is logistically almost impossible for doing any preview and pre-certification of broadcasting content, we hope to enable the broadcasters to do self certification of their own content and of course failing which there would be the broadcasting regulator who would take appropriate action. And for this, we are working out an arrangement, a very detailed self regulatory content code which will define how the self regulation process should take place within the industry itself and we are developing this code under the edges of the industry itself. They are designing the code, and government will then interact with them to finalize that code. So it is a highly interactive and iterative process that government is engaged in with the industry to develop its own self regulatory content code. Coming back to the role of Prasar Bharati, there has been certain amount of convergence even in the roles played on public sector broadcasting by the Prasar Bharati which is essentially a public service broadcaster and the private channels of land. More and more channels have begun to do public service messaging, social messaging. At the same time, Prasar Bharati continues to be pre-eminent and dominant in this area. We are also contemplating whether we should formalize this arrangement and also introduce public service broadcasting obligations which would be relevant for not only Prasar Bharati but also would be applicable to the private industry and then together. The role of Prasar Bharati not only would get mitigated but there would be greater convergence in terms of providing good quality content and covering those areas of content which may not be commercially always viable through this public service broadcasting obligations. In the end, I would like to state only one thing that in our country, not only we are having a very liberal approach but we continue to have an extremely positive and interactive association with the broadcasting industry, whether it is in the public sector or in the private sector and the government is committed to continue this process of interaction and iterative consultative process of legislation in our country which will benefit every one. Finally let me once again thank the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association and particularly the Prasar Bharati, that is hosting this year to have given me this opportunity to come and participate in the inaugural function

and share my views with you. Thank you very much and I wish the conference all success.
(clapping)