

Launching of Doordarshan: This Day in History – Sep 15

On 15 September 1959, the Government of India launched Doordarshan or DD in short, India's public service broadcaster in Delhi. Starting as an experiment with one small 5 KW transmitter and an improvised studio, DD became a national broadcaster in 1982.

Origins of Doordarshan

- When it started out, DD was part of All India Radio. The initial equipment was provided by Philips India Ltd. and the coverage area was only 40 km around the national capital. It was inaugurated by the then President Dr Rajendra Prasad.
- DD initially telecast programmes only on two days a week for a duration of one hour per day.
- With aid from the Ford Foundation, educational programmes were telecast for school children in Delhi from 1964.
- Daily transmission of programmes commenced in 1965. Duration of the broadcast was only three hours per day. It also started a news bulletin (lasting only five minutes) in 1965.
- In 1967, DD aired its first programme called 'Krishi Darshan'. This was a 20-minute programme for farmers educating them about various aspects about agriculture. This was done in collaboration with the Department of Atomic Energy, the Indian Research Institute, and the Delhi, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh governments. Krishi Darshan is one of the longest running shows on Indian television, along with Chitrahaar, a show that plays Bollywood songs.
- The television service was extended to Bombay and Amritsar in 1972.
- Gradually over the years, the duration of the service and the transmitter range were increased.
- The government conducted a satellite TV experiment in 1975-76 for educational purposes. This was the first attempt anywhere in the world to use space technology for social education. Even up to 1975, only 7 Indian cities had a TV service.
- In 1976, radio and television services were separated.
- National telecasts were started in 1982, the same year India saw colour TV.
- The then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's Independence Day speech was aired live on TV that year; so was the 1982 Asian Games which were hosted by Delhi.
- Currently, 90% of the Indian population can view DD programmes through a network of about 1400 terrestrial transmitters.
- Apart from Indian shows, DD also played programmes from NBC, ABC and other international broadcasters.
- It covers all government events and shows.

- Effective from 1997, Prasar Bharati is the broadcasting corporation that owns both Doordarshan and the All India Radio. Prasar Bharati is controlled by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting.
- Doordarshan's viewership has fallen sharply since the advent of private TV channels in 1991.
- National events including cricket tournaments are aired on DD because of the compulsory feed given to it by the private channels. It also earns revenue through this.
- DD has at present many channels including 2 all-India channels, a sports channel, an international channel, Rajya Sabha TV, Lok Sabha TV and a string of regional language channels.
- DD was and continues to be an important government tool for disseminating education, social messages and information to the public. From a humble experimental beginning in 1959, DD has grown to be India's national broadcaster with global reach as well.