

Doordarshan has lost lakhs in faulty deals, says CAG report

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The comptroller and auditor-general of India (CAG) has found shortcomings in the functioning of Doordarshan. These include financial loss due to certain contracts and lower categorisation of serials. The CAG has taken particular objection to the way Doordarshan negotiated with the sponsors of the popular programmes *The World This Week* and *Chandrakanta*.

Doordarshan allots slots for sponsored programmes on payment of sponsorship fees. The amount of fees and the free commercial time allowed to the sponsor are dependent on categorisation of a programme as Super A, A Special, A, etc. In addition, Doordarshan also books 'spots' before the programme at spot-buy rates applicable to the particular category of programme.

When it started on February 16,

1990, *The World This Week* was categorised as 'A' and was supposed to be of 52 episodes. The duration of the programme was 45 minutes for non-parliament days and 30 minutes for parliament days. However, later, taking into account the viewership of the programme and the long waiting of the spot ads, Doordarshan decided to recategorise the programme as 'A Special'.

The producer, however, did not agree to it though the Doordarshan had "a right to change the categorisation by giving a 30-day notice." The CAG has been surprised that "Doordarshan did not insist on re-categorisation to 'A Special' even while granting further extensions to the serial subsequently and 30 seconds extra time as free commercial time (FCT) in each episode of 30 minutes.

The CAG has taken particular objection to the fact that while the categorisation of the programme continued, in effect, as 'A', Doordarshan changed the programme's spot-buy rate to those applicable to 'A Special' with effect from June 1, 1990.

The CAG has argued that as per Doordarshan's rate card, the category of sponsorship fee, FCT and spot-buy

should be matching and uniform. By allowing different standards in the case of *The World This Week*, Doordarshan "had suffered a loss of Rs 127.20 lakhs on account of difference in sponsorship fee between 'A' and 'A Special' categories and Rs 225.10 lakhs on account of 30 seconds extra FCT allowed per episode. This aggregated the total loss to Rs 352.30 lakhs."

The CAG has further pointed out that "the loss would be higher as some of the programmes were of 45 minutes for which the telecast fee was to increase proportionately, the break-up of which was not furnished as of December 1995."

Similarly, in the case of the mega serial *Chandrakanta*, the CAG has objected to the manner in which Doordarshan allowed the originally proposed 52-episode serial an extension in April 1995. While granting extension, Doordarshan agreed to provide 230 seconds of additional commercial time over and above 240 seconds of FCT available to the sponsor during the one-hour slot of the programme in lieu of total payment of Rs 17 lakhs per episode.