Proposal to Amend Sports Broadcasting Act

Why in news?

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Union government has proposed to amend the Sports Broadcasting Signals Act, 2007.

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What is the Sports broadcasting signals Act about?

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- The 2007 legislation made it mandatory for private TV and radio broadcasters to share with the public broadcaster live feeds of sports events deemed “sporting events of national importance”.
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- Private broadcasters argued against this as they pay billions of rupees to bid for the rights to broadcast these events.
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- The grounds for grumbling were reduced partially because the Act allowed the private broadcaster to split the advertisement revenue earned from transmitting on Doordarshan and All India Radio in the 75:25 and 50:50 ratios, respectively.
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- National cricket matches, the semi-finals and finals of the football World Cup, certain Grand Slam tennis matches and hockey fixtures, the Asian Games, Commonwealth Games and the Summer Olympics are among the events that come under the national importance rubric.
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What is the recent proposal about?

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- Till 2017, private broadcasters faced another conundrum: Under Section 8 of the Cable Television Networks Act, all cable operators must carry two

Doordarshan channels.
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- This meant that cable companies gained access to key sporting events both through the private broadcasting channels, for which viewers have to pay, and also via Doordarshan channels, which are free.
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- This created an asymmetrical playing field since subscribers were unlikely to pay for events they can view gratis.
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- Pay TV operators also misused the provision by giving FTA (free-to-air) channels to paying subscribers, charging money from them and not sharing it with the broadcasting rights holder.
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- Now, the information and broadcasting ministry plans to amend the Act to allow games of national importance being aired on private cable and DTH platforms as well.
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- Union government also proposes to allow state-run Prasar Bharati to broadcast sporting fixtures deemed to be of national significance, which is decided by the broadcasting ministry.
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What are the concern's with the proposal?

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- Doordarshan covers every TV home in the country, so those who cannot afford to pay admittedly expensive subscription fees for sports get a good opportunity to view them.
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- Allowing other private platforms to access these feeds encourages them to revert to the earlier misuse, besides severely restricting the rights holders' ability to recoup investments.
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- There is also an additional risk embedded in this proposal which is its arbitrary nature, by which the Act allows the government to notify a sporting event as being of "national importance".
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Source: Business Standard

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