Public Service Broadcasting

Why in news?

The guidelines for television channels operating in India have been tweaked to mandate the satellite TV channels to broadcast at least 30 minutes of content daily on themes of national importance and of social relevance.

What is the new guidelines about?

- The Guidelines for Uplinking and Downlinking of Satellite Television Channels in India, 2022 were approved by the Union Cabinet recently.
- The new guidelines have been amended after a gap of 11 years and a number of steps have been taken for ease of doing business.
- As per the guidelines, the Central Government may, from time to time, issue general advisory to the channels for telecast of content in national interest, and the channel shall comply with the same.
- **Rationale** - As airwaves and frequencies are public property, a company with permission to operate in India, barring foreign channels, will have to air content in the service of the public.

Key features of the new guidelines

- It is obligatory for all TV channels, including private channels to broadcast content on themes of national importance and socially relevant issues for at least 30 minutes every day.
- Eight themes have been identified for this purpose.
    1. Education and spread of literacy
    2. Agriculture and rural development
    3. Health and family welfare
    4. Science and technology
    5. Welfare of women
    6. Welfare of the weaker sections of the society
    7. Protection of environment and of cultural heritage
    8. National integration
- **Non-compliance** - If a channel continues to be non-compliant, steps can be taken based on specific advisories that will be issued from time to time and on a case-to-case basis.
- **Exemptions** - The exemption may apply to wildlife channels and foreign channels, besides live telecasts in the case of sports channels.

What else do the guidelines say?

Currently, Singapore is considered the hub of teleport uplinking.

- The new guidelines allow a news agency to get permission for 5 years instead of the current 1 year.
- The penalty clauses have been rationalised, and separate sets of penalties have been proposed for different types of contraventions against the current method of uniform penalty.
- Broadcast companies will be allowed to uplink foreign channels from Indian teleports, which would create employment opportunities and make India a teleport hub for other countries.

Powers of the Information and Broadcasting (I&B) Ministry

- The I&B Ministry had the powers to regulate content across TV channels, newspapers, magazines, movies in theatres and on TV, and the radio.
- The Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, extended its regulatory powers over internet content too, especially on digital news platforms and OTT platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime or Hotstar.
- To know more about the powers of the I&B Ministry, click here

References

1. The Hindu | Content slot: On guidelines for television channels
2. The Indian Express | What new TV broadcast guidelines say
3. The Indian Express | I&B Ministry's powers to regulate content

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