

Like many other public sector industries and leading banking and financial institutions of the country, PTVC, alas, is also being put on the auction block. The ostensible reason given by the management is the corporation's financial (or is it professional) bankruptcy. The acting MD recently announced that twelve hours time on PTV 2 from 6 pm to 6 am will be sold to the highest bidder to tide over the company's financial difficulties and somehow keep it afloat.

For a clear perception of the situation, it may be recalled that PTV's second channel, PTV 2, was introduced in the late eighties on AsiaSat transponder with financial and technical assistance from Japan, which had offered to divert part of its development grant to PTV to launch its second channel for the dissemination of formal education. A team of Japanese experts spent quite sometime in Pakistan to hammer out the feasibility of the project and build infrastructure for the educational channel. It was clearly laid down in the conditionalities of the loan that the second channel would be used exclusively for the production of educational programmes to supplement schools and college curricula.

The Japanese team took about six months to build a well-equipped and, probably, the best TV studio complex in Islamabad; but PTV, during this entire period, sat back and did nothing on one pretext or the other to produce the required software with the result that when the studio was commissioned, there were no educational programmes in hand to be put on air on the second channel. A brand new sparkling studio with the latest equipment and the full compliment of professional staff stood idly by just televising a few shoddy old Allama Iqbal Open University programmes, much to the amusement of the audiences of 30 odd countries of the world.

So, PTV not only violated its agreement with Japan but also wasted a golden opportu-

nity to introduce educational TV in the country. In the process, it also squandered millions of dollars worth of satellite time through sheer negligence and lack of planning.

Any way, after about a year of the launching of PTV 2, the management came up with a face-saving scheme to utilize PTV 2 time from 6 pm onwards for the simultaneous telecast of PTV 1 programmes, which means that the same programmes were being telecast on channel 1 through microwave national network as well as on channel 2 via satellite. It was nothing but sheer duplication as PTV paid huge sums of money through its nose to the two signal carriers. This presumably may have been one major cause of the financial crunch PTV is facing today.

Getting back to the "sale of time" propos-

al, one fails to understand as to who will be naive enough to purchase 6 pm to 6 am time slot at lump sum price while he can utilise only six evening prime time hours profitably while the rest i.e., 12 to 6 am will be just sheer waste. This is night time not only in Pakistan, but also in all the countries where PTV 2 signal is beamed. If PTV has any plausible explanation for this seemingly irrational scheme, it should better come out with it.

Secondly, although PTV may earn a pretty packet by selling its valuable prime time on the satellite Channel to meet its day-to-day expenses, but it will lose in the process its professional integrity, the morale of its production cadres and its worldwide viewership. Even in Pakistan, about 30 per cent households which get excellent reception through

the dish antennas will be sourly disappointed as the normal roof or indoor antennas through which people will receive PTV 1 programmes can never match the dish quality.

Thirdly, will the party which will purchase time, will allow PTV news and current affair programmes to be relayed from PTV 2? If not, which is most likely, PTV will callously deprive its overseas viewers (Pakistanis and Indians) of the country's news and political scenario.

Fourthly, has PTV considered how its Channel 1, will compete favourably with its Channel 2 which will be seen by its new proprietors on purely commercial lines, and possibly present better programmes and attract bigger chunk of viewership and advertising revenue. Looking at PTV's present state of affairs, it can be said with absolute certainty that PTV will not even be able to compete, but will go down ignominiously.

In view of these gloomy, rather frightening prospects, PTV should reconsider its decision to sell 12 hours of its time very carefully and take the nation into confidence before taking any step which might damage a very important and sensitive national institutions.

The writer is a former Director of PTV

✓ Mass Communion
The Nation
16.6.97

PTV on sale

PTV should reconsider its decision to sell 12 hours of its time very carefully, writes BURHANUDDIN HASAN