GENERAL STUDIES II

Prasar Bharati Autonomy UPSC 2026: Complete Notes

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Understand Prasar Bharati's role in India's democracy, its statutory autonomy under the Prasar Bharati Act, 1990, and the challenges of editorial independence. Explore public service broadcasting, constitutional principles, institutional reforms, UPSC Prelims facts, Mains and GS Paper II Mains analysis.

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A comprehensive analysis of India's public-service broadcasting system, editorial freedom, statutory responsibilities,

UPSC Syllabus Relevance

- **GS Paper II:** Governance, transparency, accountability and statutory institutions.
- **GS Paper IV:** Media ethics, objectivity and integrity in public institutions.
- **Essay:** Democracy, freedom of expression and institutional independence.
- **Prelims:** Prasar Bharati Act, 1990, Akashvani, Doordarshan and statutory functions.

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1. Introduction: Why Prasar Bharati Matters

A democracy requires more than periodic elections. It also requires citizens to have access to reliable information, diverse opinions and independent public institutions.

Public-service broadcasting is an important part of this democratic information system. Unlike purely commercial media, a public broadcaster has an obligation to serve society, including communities that may not be commercially attractive to private broadcasting companies.

In India, **Prasar Bharati** occupies this important institutional position through its radio and television broadcasting services.

The debate surrounding public broadcasting raises a fundamental question: **Can an institution financed and established by the State operate independently from day-to-day political influence?**

Central Argument: Public ownership and public-service independence are not identical. The democratic value of a broadcaster depends on editorial freedom, balanced reporting, public trust and institutional accountability.

2. What Is Prasar Bharati?

Prasar Bharati is India's statutory public-service broadcasting corporation. It was established under the **Prasar Bharati (Broadcasting Corporation of India) Act, 1990** and came into existence on **23 November 1997**.

Legal Foundation
Prasar Bharati Act, 1990

Establishment
23 November 1997

Radio Broadcasting
Akashvani (All India Radio)

Television Broadcasting
Doordarshan

Institutional Nature
Statutory corporation

Administrative Ministry
Ministry of Information and Broadcasting

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Prasar Bharati is not merely another government department. It has a distinct statutory identity, with functions, responsibilities and governance arrangements defined by law.

3. Objectives of the Prasar Bharati Act, 1990

Section 12 of the Act specifies the major duties and functions of the corporation.

3.1 Inform, Educate and Entertain

Its primary duty includes providing public broadcasting services that inform, educate and entertain citizens while promoting balanced development of radio and television.

3.2 Objective and Balanced Information

Public broadcasting should protect citizens' access to truthful, objective and balanced information. This includes the fair presentation of contrasting views without promoting an ideology of its own.

3.3 Promotion of Education

The corporation must pay attention to education, literacy, science, agriculture, rural development, health and other socially significant subjects.

3.4 Cultural and Linguistic Diversity

India's diversity creates a special need for regional-language broadcasting and the representation of different cultural, linguistic and social communities.

3.5 Social Inclusion

Public broadcasting also has obligations towards weaker sections, tribal communities, minorities, children, persons with disabilities and people living in remote areas.

> **Prelims Alert:** Section 12 of the Prasar Bharati Act is especially important because it defines the institution's public-service responsibilities.

4. Public-Service Broadcaster vs State Broadcaster

The distinction between public-service broadcasting and state-controlled broadcasting is essential for understanding media autonomy.

Basis	Public-Service Broadcaster	State-Controlled Broadcaster
Primary Purpose	Serve citizens and public interest	Primarily communicate government perspectives
Editorial Policy	Professional and independent	May be influenced by executive preferences
Accountability	Public, statutory and institutional	Primarily administrative and executive
Political Coverage	Pluralistic and balanced	May give preference to official viewpoints
Financial Support	Can include public financing	Often dependent on state funding
Measure of Success	Public trust, access and quality	Policy communication and administrative priorities

These are conceptual distinctions rather than absolute categories. The actual degree of independence must be assessed through governance arrangements, editorial decisions, funding practices and transparency.

5. Why Editorial Independence Is Essential

5.1 Protection of Democratic Debate

Independent broadcasting ensures that policy decisions, public grievances, opposition viewpoints and social issues receive scrutiny without undue political interference.

5.2 Right to Information

The freedom of speech and expression guaranteed by Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution is closely connected with the public's ability to receive information and ideas.

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5.3 Electoral Fairness

Balanced reporting helps citizens evaluate competing political claims and encourages informed participation in elections.

5.4 Public Confidence

A broadcaster earns trust through factual accuracy, transparency, correction mechanisms and impartial treatment of competing viewpoints.

5.5 Social and Regional Inclusion

Public-service institutions can reach rural communities, remote regions and minority-language audiences that may receive inadequate attention from commercial broadcasters.

6. Major Challenges Facing Prasar Bharati

6.1 Financial Dependence

Reliance on public funding may create concerns about budgetary influence over institutional decisions. Financial support must therefore be combined with safeguards for autonomy.

6.2 Governance and Appointments

The credibility of a public broadcaster depends partly on transparent appointments, professional leadership and well-defined institutional responsibilities.

6.3 Competition from Digital Media

Online news platforms, streaming services, podcasts and social media have transformed audience expectations. Public broadcasters must adapt technologically without abandoning their public-interest mission.

6.4 Commercialisation

Pressure to generate advertising revenue may encourage entertainment-focused programming at the expense of educational, developmental or regional content.

6.5 Perceptions of Political Bias

Allegations of one-sided reporting can reduce public trust. However, criticism or an editorial opinion alone does not establish a legal violation. Such claims require objective assessment of evidence and institutional standards.

7. Public Broadcasting and Constitutional Values

The significance of independent broadcasting extends beyond institutional administration. It supports broader constitutional and democratic principles.

- **Article 19(1)(a):** Freedom of speech and expression.
- **Article 14:** Equality before the law and equal protection of laws.
- **Democratic accountability:** Public institutions should remain open to scrutiny.

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- **Pluralism:** Different communities and viewpoints deserve fair representation.
- **Social justice:** Information should reach disadvantaged and underserved groups.

The goal is not to eliminate accountability but to ensure that accountability mechanisms do not become instruments of partisan editorial control.

8. Suggested Reforms for Stronger Autonomy

Reform Area	Suggested Measure	Expected Benefit
Appointments	Transparent and merit-based selection	Greater institutional credibility
Funding	Predictable multi-year financial arrangements	Reduced short-term funding pressure
Editorial Policy	Published impartiality and accuracy guidelines	Consistent professional standards
Grievance Redressal	Credible and accessible complaints mechanism	Public accountability
Public Reporting	Regular disclosure of performance indicators	Transparency
Digital Transformation	Accessible digital platforms and regional content	Wider public reach

9. Public Broadcasting in the Digital Age

The future of public-service broadcasting increasingly depends on the ability to combine traditional broadcasting with digital delivery.

- Develop reliable multilingual digital news services.
- Improve accessibility for persons with disabilities.
- Expand educational and rural-development programming.
- Preserve valuable audio and television archives.
- Build credible fact-checking and correction systems.
- Maintain a clear distinction between journalism, advertising and sponsored information.

Digital expansion should improve the quality and accessibility of public information rather than make audience engagement the sole measure of institutional performance.

10. UPSC Prelims: Important Facts

- Prasar Bharati is a statutory corporation.
- Its enabling legislation is the Prasar Bharati Act, 1990.
- It came into existence on 23 November 1997.
- Its principal broadcasting constituents are Akashvani and Doordarshan.

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- Section 12 sets out its primary public-service functions.
- Public-service broadcasting includes the responsibility to present balanced information and contrasting viewpoints.
- Prasar Bharati should not be confused with a constitutional body.

11. UPSC Prelims Practice MCQs

Question 1

Consider the following statements about Prasar Bharati:

1. It is a constitutional body.
2. It was established under legislation enacted in 1990.
3. Doordarshan and Akashvani are its principal constituents.

Which statements are correct?

(A) 1 and 2 only
(B) 2 and 3 only
(C) 1 and 3 only
(D) 1, 2 and 3

View Correct Answer and Explanation

Answer: B

Prasar Bharati is a statutory, not constitutional, corporation. It was established under the 1990 Act and includes Doordarshan and Akashvani.

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Question 2

Which of the following is consistent with Section 12 of the Prasar Bharati Act?

(A) Promotion of only commercially profitable programmes
(B) Exclusive representation of the ruling government
(C) Fair presentation of contrasting viewpoints
(D) Replacement of all private broadcasters

View Correct Answer and Explanation

Answer: C

The provision emphasises truthful, objective and balanced information, including contrasting viewpoints.

Question 3

The principle of editorial autonomy in public broadcasting primarily seeks to:

(A) Remove all forms of public accountability
(B) Protect professional editorial decisions from undue interference
(C) Prevent public financing of broadcasting
(D) Eliminate parliamentary oversight

View Correct Answer and Explanation

Answer: B

Editorial independence is compatible with transparent financial, professional and statutory accountability.

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12. UPSC Mains Practice Question

GS Paper 2 | 15 Marks | 250 Words

"Public ownership does not automatically guarantee public-service broadcasting."

Critically examine this statement in the context of Prasar Bharati, with particular reference to editorial independence, democratic accountability and institutional reforms in India.

Suggested Mains Answer Framework

Introduction:

Define public-service broadcasting and introduce Prasar Bharati as a statutory institution created to serve citizens through radio and television.

Body:

- Explain the importance of editorial independence.
- Discuss Section 12 and its public-service objectives.
- Analyse challenges relating to funding and governance.
- Highlight the importance of regional inclusion and pluralism.
- Recommend transparent appointments, editorial safeguards and independent evaluation.

Conclusion:

Institutional autonomy and public accountability should be strengthened together. A credible public broadcaster must prioritise constitutional values, citizens' information needs and democratic trust.

13. Value Addition for UPSC Essay

> "An independent public broadcaster should inform citizens, not merely amplify the voice of those in power."

This principle may be used when writing essays on the fourth pillar of democracy, freedom of expression, democratic accountability or institutional ethics.

14. Frequently Asked Questions

What is Prasar Bharati?

Prasar Bharati is India's statutory public-service broadcasting corporation, established under the Prasar Bharati Act, 1990.

When was Prasar Bharati established?

Prasar Bharati came into existence on 23 November 1997.

Is Prasar Bharati a constitutional body?

No. It is a statutory corporation created under an Act of Parliament.

What are the two principal components of Prasar Bharati?

Akashvani (All India Radio) and Doordarshan.

Why is Section 12 important for UPSC?

Section 12 specifies major public-service functions, including informing, educating and entertaining citizens and providing fair, balanced information.

What is editorial independence?

Editorial independence refers to the freedom of professional broadcasters and journalists to make news and programming decisions without undue political or other external interference.

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15. Conclusion: The Way Forward

Prasar Bharati occupies a distinctive position in India's democratic and media landscape. Its statutory purpose extends well beyond delivering government communication. It is expected to contribute to public education, informed citizenship, cultural diversity and access to balanced information.

The challenge is to translate the promise of statutory autonomy into effective institutional practice. Transparent governance, editorial safeguards, predictable funding, public accountability and digital adaptation can help strengthen the institution.

Ultimately, the success of public-service broadcasting should be measured not by its closeness to the government of the day, but by its credibility, inclusiveness and service to the people of India.

Quick Revision Takeaway

Prasar Bharati = Statutory Body + Public-Service Broadcasting + Editorial Autonomy + Balanced Information + Democratic Accountability.

SEO Tags

Prasar Bharati | Prasar Bharati Act 1990 | Prasar Bharati Autonomy UPSC 2026 | Public Broadcasting India | Editorial Independence | Indian Polity UPSC | Doordarshan | Akashvani | GS Paper 2 Governance | Media Accountability | UPSC Current Affairs | Indian Democracy

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