



P.L.RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY

Building Bureaucrats Since 2006

2. Draft Telecommunications (Television, Radio and Associated Services) Rules, 2026 – Polity

The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) has released draft Telecommunications (Television, Radio and Associated Services) Rules, 2026 for public consultation. The draft rules represent the most comprehensive attempt in India's broadcasting history to consolidate a fragmented, multi-layered regulatory architecture into a single, unified framework – a reform long demanded by industry stakeholders and governance reformers alike.

1. Background – The Regulatory Fragmentation Problem

India's broadcasting sector has historically been governed through a patchwork of policy guidelines issued at different points in time by different administrative orders. Direct-to-Home (DTH) broadcasting has been regulated under guidelines issued in 2001, Headend-in-the-Sky (HITS) services under guidelines from 2009, FM Radio under Phase-III guidelines from 2011, Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) under 2008 guidelines, and satellite television up linking and downlinking under 2022 guidelines. Community Radio Stations operate under Revised Policy Guidelines issued in 2024. This fragmented architecture created unequal compliance burdens, jurisdictional ambiguities, and a dated regulatory environment ill-suited to the convergence of broadcasting, telecommunications, and digital media that now characterises the industry.

The foundational legislative shift enabling this consolidation was the passage of the Telecommunications Act, 2023, which replaced the colonial-era Indian Telegraph Act of 1885 – a 138-year-old statute that had outlived its relevance by several decades. The MIB administers provisions of the 2023 Act relating to television, radio, and associated broadcasting services, and the 2026 Rules operationalise this mandate.

2. Key Features of the Draft Rules

- 1. Unified Regulatory Framework** – The most significant structural innovation of the draft rules is the consolidation of multiple existing platform-specific guidelines into a single regulatory document. DTH, FM Radio, Community Radio, IPTV, HITS, and satellite television channels will all be governed under one framework rather than separate, often inconsistent, policy guidelines. This harmonisation reduces compliance complexity and eliminates the legal grey areas that arise when different guidelines contain conflicting provisions.
- 2. Removal of Grant of Permission Agreement (GOPA)** – The current system requires broadcasters and service providers to sign a Grant of Permission Agreement with the government – a formal, document-heavy process that has historically been associated with delays and administrative friction. The draft rules abolish this requirement, replacing it with a streamlined authorisation process. This reform directly reduces entry barriers and administrative burden for new and existing operators.
- 3. Public Interest Obligations** – The draft rules introduce mandatory public interest content requirements for both television and radio. Television channels are required to broadcast a minimum of 30 minutes of content daily on themes of national importance and social relevance. Private FM radio stations must dedicate at least one hour per day to such content. Additionally, radio stations are required to ensure that at least 20% of their daily programming comprises local content – a

provision designed to protect regional languages, cultures, and community voices from being entirely displaced by national and global content.

4. **Digital Implementation** – The entire authorisation process will be implemented through digital platforms, eliminating the need for physical document submission and enabling real-time tracking and transparency in the licensing process. This aligns with the government's broader Digital India and e-governance objectives.

3.Guidelines Consolidated Under the Draft Rules

The draft rules integrate six distinct sets of previously applicable guidelines – the Satellite Television Uplinking and Downlinking Guidelines (2022), DTH Broadcasting Guidelines (2001), HITS Broadcasting Guidelines (2009), FM Radio Phase III Guidelines (2011), Revised Community Radio Guidelines (2024), and IPTV Guidelines (2008) – into a single coherent document, eliminating decades of regulatory fragmentation.

4.Significance of the Draft Rules

1. **Ease of doing business** is materially improved when broadcasters, cable operators, FM radio stations, and community radio networks operate under a single, clear, predictable regulatory framework rather than navigating multiple overlapping guidelines of varying vintage.
2. **Digital governance** gains from the digital authorisation process, which reduces discretion, improves transparency, and builds an auditable record of regulatory decisions.
3. **Broadcasting sector growth** is supported by a simplified regulatory environment that reduces compliance costs, lowers barriers for new entrants, and creates a more level playing field across different broadcasting platforms.
4. **Convergence-readiness** – As broadcasting, broadband, and communications technologies continue to converge – with streaming, OTT platforms, and internet radio blurring traditional distinctions – a unified regulatory framework positions India better to govern the emerging media landscape coherently.

Concerns and Areas for Attention

1. The **public interest content obligation** of 30 minutes per day for television channels will need careful implementation to ensure compliance is substantive rather than nominal – avoiding a situation where channels fulfil the letter of the requirement while undermining its spirit through scheduling choices.
2. The **local content requirement** of 20% for radio stations is potentially significant for community and regional broadcasters, but will need to be monitored for enforcement, particularly in markets where national content is commercially more viable.
3. The **adequacy of public consultation** before finalisation of the rules will determine their legitimacy and durability. Broadcasting stakeholders – from large media conglomerates to small community radio operators – have distinct interests that must be balanced in the final framework.

5.Way Forward

1. The MIB should ensure a genuinely **inclusive public consultation process** – with specific outreach to community radio operators, regional language broadcasters, and civil society media organisations whose interests may be overshadowed by larger commercial players.
2. **Implementation timelines** for transitioning existing licensees from their current permissions to the new unified framework should be clearly specified and accompanied by adequate technical support.

3. A **periodic review mechanism** should be built into the rules themselves, ensuring that the regulatory framework keeps pace with the rapidly evolving broadcasting and digital media landscape.

Source - <https://newsonair.gov.in/centre-releases-draft-telecommunication-rules-2026-for-public-consultation/>