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PUNIT GOENKA leads one of the biggest television networks in the country. Having taken over from father Subhash Chandra as managing director and chief executive officer of ZEE Entertainment Enterprises Ltd, he wishes to make the network more contemporary for today's audience. A man who does not believe in mincing his words, he talks to Urvi Malvania about life after the MediaPro split, troubles in the international business, focus on strengthening the sports bouquet distribution and hurdles in rolling out the much-anticipated ratings system under the Broadcast Audience Research Council. Edited excerpts:

**PUNIT GOENKA**

Managing director
& chief executive officer,
ZEE Entertainment Enterprises

What are your plans for the international business, especially as international subscription revenues have been flat or falling over the past few quarters?

We are expanding our international operations. That is where launches in Indonesia figure. In the past few years, international (subscription revenues) have either been flat or dipped. The third and fourth generation Indian does

not connect with the kind of content produced in India. Until we see a critical mass out there for which you can create content specifically, one would not make that kind of high investment.

The Indonesian business is growing and we are happy with the progress. The focus is going to be in other geographies within Southeast Asia. The next one planned is Thailand, followed by Vietnam. These are the two big ones coming up this year in that region. We already have a strong presence in the Middle East and will continue to consolidate the market. The new market we are proposing to look at this year is going to be multiple countries in Africa. That's the focus in

the international business.

Will this also mean getting some of the international channels to India?

Most of the international channels have Indian content that is re-purposed for international consumption. We are looking at opportunities of getting Veria (the lifestyle and wellness channel) to India but it will be a pure distribution business. It is in a very premium niche segment.

After the MediaPro split, what does your distribution strategy look like?

We have already set up the

team for ourselves and it will include (distributing) the sports bouquet, not there earlier as part of MediaPro. I believe it is a strong enough bouquet for us to get the growth levels that we had projected while we were with MediaPro.

TEN does not have a lot of India cricket for the next couple of years. This can be a hindrance in distributing the channel. How will you combat it?

I think we have a great portfolio of content which is within the cricket genre but is non-India content. There is plenty of football on our network, along with plenty of tennis and golf. It is a myth that cricket sells and nothing else.

But the inclusion or rather the non-inclusion of the ZEE sports bouquet (in the MediaPro) bouquet was a reason for the split as well?

Definitely, that (sports distribution) was one of the reasons (for the split). But the primary reason is the regulation

that has caused us to part ways. Second, it is an opportunity, where the sports bouquet, if at all perceived to be weak, can use the strength of the entertainment channels and still grow despite not having India cricket.

Is the Broadcast Audience Research Council on track to keep the date of October 1?

The biggest challenge we're facing right now is the Indian Readership Survey fiasco. That is the only spoke in the wheel today. They have not released the data to us and that is the delay. But I'm pretty confident that by the end of the year, we will be able to implement ratings (system) under BARC. It is not about credibility. I have not questioned the credibility, as I have not seen the data yet. I am no one to question the data in that case.

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