

Star gears up to take its channels to South, West Asia

New Delhi, May 10: As part of its overall strategy to make Star India a leading broadcasting force in Asia, Star is all set to launch international versions of its popular television channels Star Plus, Star One and Star Gold in the overseas markets of South Asia and West Asia. Star will launch these region-specific new channels shortly from India as it shifts the uplink base from Hong Kong to Mumbai, sources told FE.

The new channels from Star India are tentatively named Star Plus Middle East, Star One Middle East, Star Gold South East Asia and Star One South East Asia. These channels will have a mix of programming from the existing networks and some region specific shows, sources said. "The growing markets of West Asia and South East Asia will see an active role of Star channels. We can also look forward to future content based in these regions including reality shows and drama shot or based in the countries of West Asia and South East Asia," a source in Star said.

Star Plus has been a genre leader in the country for over nine years till it faced stiff competition from new entrant Colors and well-established Zee TV. However, off-late Star Plus has managed to regain its top slot successively for several weeks based on weeking rating numbers. Star Plus Middle East is being positioned as a genre leader in the region considering the vast populations of non-resident Indians and people from Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh.

The pay-television market for Indian channels in South East Asia and West Asia is estimated to be around Rs 500-600 crore annually and growing at a fast rate of around 8-10%. Star is looking to tap into this cash-rich market by riding on the popular shows to the Indian Diaspora, sources said.

This move is part of Rupert Murdoch owned Star's restructuring exercise that began last year when Uday Shankar, CEO, Star India was entrusted with the bigger role of managing entire operation of Star spread in South East Asia and the Middle East from India. As a first step towards expanding the Star's brand names in the region, Star India will soon relocate the uplink of all its channels from Hong Kong to India, a first for Star since entering the country over 15 years ago.

Star India is said to have roped in Essel Shyam, a leading teleport operator to manage the uplink-downlink of all its 11 channels from Mumbai. Earlier, Star India was mulling starting its own teleport operations. However, various factors including cost implications led to Star outsourcing this work to Essel Shyam, Star insiders told FE. Sources said, Star India has obtained all necessary government clearances to launch all these channels from within the country.