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## What Afghanistan wants to see on television

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When Afghans turn on their televisions, they do not want to be regaled with current affairs or debates on the Koran. Instead, they want Indian soap operas, complete with sari-clad women and convoluted love stories.

Tolo TV, the country's most popular broadcaster, was quick to learn this lesson. The Indian dramas which dominate peak time get 10 or 11 million viewers; news programmes cause a national turn-off.

A contestant auditions for Tolo TV's Afghan Star, a Pop Idol inspired singing talent competition

Afghan television is the most visible symbol of the country's transformation since the Taliban's downfall in 2001.

The ancien regime condemned television as "un-Islamic", closed down every broadcaster and publicly crushed thousands of TV sets with bulldozers.

Today, Afghanistan has 13 stations, yet the old suspicion of television as a corrupting, Westernising influence remains strong. Saad Mohseni, head of the Moby Media Group which includes Tolo TV, said the authorities were "not tolerant or relaxed at all".

He added:

"President Karzai himself has been quite tolerant and if push comes to shove, he'll defend the free press. But the government is not one individual, it's a number of movements, parties and ideologies.

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"Individuals in the government are not happy with the free media and they have put obstacles in our path and we've probably suffered more than any other station. But we're still here."

Anyone running a TV station in Kabul encounters challenges found nowhere else in the world. Mr Mohseni must generate his own electricity - the mains supply only four hours of power on a good day - and hire his own armed guards in a city plagued by violence.

He believes his viewers are deeply disillusioned by the state of Afghanistan. "The level of frustration has reached boiling point," said Mr Mohseni.

"It's not because Afghanistan hasn't improved. It has improved. But relative to expectations, what people were promised hasn't been delivered."