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Turner-Warner to take on Zee, Star

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TURNER INTERNATIONAL India and Warner Bros Entertainment on Wednesday announced they will launch on March 16 an English general entertainment channel (GEC) targeted at Indian audiences and based on licensed content from overseas, throwing up competition for the media baron Rupert Murdoch's Star World and Subhash Chandra's Zee Café channels aimed largely at urban English speaking viewers.

Called WB, the channel will start with a free-to-air format but plans to be a pay channel later. Broadcasters increasingly use direct-to-home TV to charge viewers

for channels or programmes in addition to basic bouquets, especially for shows that target upscale customers. The stage is also set for a video download market.

Both Turner, which is a broadcaster, and Warner, which distributes content, are part of media conglomerate Time Warner. Warner is sitting on a captive library of content.

Turner and Warner declined to reveal the investment details. Sanjay Salil, chief executive of media consulting firm MediaGuru, told HT that the marketing, distribution and licensed content would cost no more than Rs. 150 crore in the first year, while the channel can start off with an annual revenue of Rs. 60 crore.

"It makes perfect sense for big players

to get into the English GEC space," he said.

Steve Marcopoto, Asia-Pacific president for Turner Broadcasting, said India was proving to be resilient, while the region as a whole saw growth of 15 per cent or more last year.

"We expect flat growth in regions like Japan, Hong Kong and Singapore whereas India is still expected to grow at about seven per cent and above," he said. Unlike Time Warner's movie channel HBO, the new channel will also feature content such as TV series and Hollywood gossip.

The new channel comes on the heels of Turner's Hindi GEC channel 'Real' in partnership with Alva Brothers, as the group looks to prop up sagging Asian growth.

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