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AMITABH BACHCHAN

Lock Kiya Jaye: Big B on KBC hot seat again

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THE popular quiz show *Kaun Banega Crorepati* (KBC) is returning with its original star—Amitabh Bachchan—but on a new channel, Sony. Speaking about his decision to return, Mr Bachchan told ET, "Sony made me an offer that I couldn't refuse. That's why I'm back."

The last season of KBC, which saw Shahrukh Khan stepping in as host, was not able to attract as many eyeballs as the first two seasons. Gradually, consensus emerged that Mr Bachchan did a better job.

However, Mr Bachchan takes a more charitable view of the Shahrukh Khan-hosted season of KBC: "I think it's a fallacy that others were not able to do justice to the show. Circumstances change, the number of viewers change and the parameters used to decipher the success of a show changes. Shahrukh was extremely good, and I saw a lot of his episodes. He brought life to the show."

SET claims Mr Bachchan was the only choice for the show. Ajit Thakur, EVP and business head, SET, said: "Since it's about both education and entertainment, he (Mr Bachchan) has the stature to pull it off credibly." Undeterred by Mr Bachchan's uneven performance at the box office of late, the channel cites research showing that Mr Bachchan is more popular than ever before. While not getting into specifics of the new show, SET admits that there will be major innovations in the offing.

"Sony has pioneered format innovation, whether it's Indian Idol, Big Boss or Fear Factor. We believe in bringing the family together with inclusive content. KBC has a legacy. There hasn't been, and will never be a bigger show," Mr Thakur added.

Media planners view this as an attempt by SET to bring in "tent-pole programming" after its revamp earlier this year, including original content from Yash Raj Films, failed to meet expectations. Says Divya Gururaj, managing director, Mediacom: "They got a lot of big names with impressive credentials, but it did not shake the position in terms of rankings and did nothing to improve gross rating points (GRPs) of the channel."

However, the million-dollar question is whether a revitalised KBC will deliver? Ms Gururaj says: "KBC is not a fresh content. All reality shows tend to run out of steam around the fourth or fifth season. Unless Sony is able to revive it, a mere plug and play of the old idea won't work."

The eventual success of KBC will depend on how much SET has tweaked the show to meet the demands of a more cluttered media environment and a viewership with a shrinking attention span.