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Zainoor Sulaiman.

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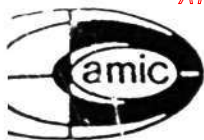
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**Social And Cultural Impact Of
Satellite Broadcasting In Asia :
A Malaysian Perspective**

by

Zainoor Sulaiman



ASIAN MASS COMMUNICATION RESEARCH AND INFORMATION CENTRE
39 NEWTON ROAD, SINGAPORE 1130, REPUBLIC OF SINGAPORE

**SEMINAR ON THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL IMPACT OF
SATELLITE BROADCASTING IN ASIA:**

A MALAYSIAN PERSPECTIVE

By ZAINOOR SULAIMAN
Editor Corporate Services
Malaysian National News Agency (BERNAMA)

1. INTRODUCTION.

- 1.1 The paper proposes to highlight and discuss events and developments as well as the impacts of satellite broadcast in Malaysia. Issues related to the satellite broadcast have become "hot" items in the media during recent months that could sour relations between between Malaysia and its closest neighbour, and cause a rift between the Federal Government and the east Malaysian State of Sarawak.

2. RTM FUMBLE

- 2.1 I am certain that many of us here have read or watched the coverage by the international media of the incident in Dili, East Timor when troops allegedly fired at a crowd of demonstrators, resulting in the casualties of many civilians. The video clipping of the incident was aired by the government owned Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) over its nation-wide "Dunia Jam 10" or World News at 10pm segment.
- 2.2 Thanks to the modern satellite communications, Malaysia's TV programmes can be watched in Indonesia as all the Malaysian television networks use the Indonesian Palapa satellite to broadcast their programmes to the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak. The broadcast of the Dili incident, had caused an uproar in Indonesia and some Indonesian leaders even suggested

2.3 This prompted the Malaysian Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahmat to fly to Indonesia to explain the slip up was not intentional and that the editor on duty had overlooked the sensitivity of the issue when deciding to use the video clipping. Mohamed said what had happened should not have occurred at all. It was due to the negligence and carelessness of those involved. And as a result of the fumble, our colleague at RTM was reprimanded. He has been downgraded from his post as the influential head of TV Current Affairs and News Department to a lesser position in the Radio News section.

3. PARABOLIC CONTROVERSY

- 3.1 The Sarawak government created a controversy when it announced that the state may legalise the use of the parabolic satellite dish because of its widespread use in the state. Says Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Amar Dr Wong Soon Kai: " There are many parabola (parabolic satellite dish) here already. ... the government has to do something about it."
- 3.2 Hundreds of households in the state currently have such installations. The black market there is charging between RM4,000 and RM5,000 (US\$1.00 is equivalent to RM2.6) for a piece of the equipment, inclusive of

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installation and a six month guarantee. With these receivers, one can tune in to literally any television programme in the world, including those from China, United States and Europe.

3.3 The Telecommunications Department says it has detected 20 illegal parabolic antenna or TVRO (television receiver only) equipment nationwide, many of them in Sarawak. According to Energy, Telecommunications and Post Minister Datuk Seri S. Samy Vellu the government estimated that there are many more TVRO which remained undetected. Stressing that the government will not allow the use of TVRO and will not issue licences for their use, he said the Telecommunications Act 1950 will be amended to tighten legal provisions on the use of the equipment by the public. Under Section 39(1) of the Act, individuals are not allowed to use the equipment and the Cabinet has decided that only certain people could use it. They include the Yang di-Pertuan Agong (the king), the Rulers, the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister. Broadcasting companies and those producing the equipment for export and for testing as well as foreign missions are also allowed to use the equipment.

3.4 TVRO is allowed in neighbouring countries like Indonesia as it is an efficient communication network to link all the islands in the republic. However, the Malaysian government fears that the use of parabolic antenna for

TVRO will expose the people to negative programmes that can affect their moral values, thinking and culture.

4. CABINET DECISION

4.1 As a result, the federal cabinet has directed the dismantling of all privately owned parabolic satellite dishes for wider reception of television signals and that action be taken against the users. Information Minister Datuk Mohamed Rahmat has reiterated that the cabinet was for fear of the adverse implications on the viewer of direct reception of television signals via satellite.

4.2 The Customs and Excise Department has been told to step up measures to prevent the import of the dishes now widely used in Sarawak.

4.3 But a senior government official says efforts to curb the use of parabolic dishes to receive foreign television programmes have been stifled by the availability of cheap and portable miniature models. The Director-General of the Malaysian Institute of Microelectronic Systems (MIMOS), Dr Tengku Mohamed Azzman Shariffudeen says the dishes are currently available in the open market and its foldable features made it easy to conceal. It has the same capability to receive TV programmes from around the world as the big one.

"It is one of the effects of +information explosion+

where man is threatened to be swamped by the deluge of information available at the push of a button and he badly needs a value system to choose between what to accept and what to discard," says Tengku Mohamed.

4.4 Whatever success the authorities had achieved so far in the crackdown on the use of the dish is temporary as the cheaply mass-produced dish is now easily available in the open market.

The foldable, umbrella-like miniature model made in Taiwan, which is also popular among cable television networks, can easily be concealed and smuggled.

Authorities will also have to put up with other forms of information sharing, namely through networking, where a subscriber can easily transmit and receive information (text and pictures) from anywhere in the world. The use of IT products in Malaysia has increased rapidly, achieving an expected market size of more than RM1.9 billion in 1992.

5. RULING RELAXED

5.1. Realising the difficulties in enforcing the cabinet ruling, the federal government has announced that it is prepared to approve the use of parabolic dish in Sarawak to enable viewers to receive foreign programmes. Says Deputy Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Minister, Datuk Tajol Rosli Ghazali: "We will make a slight relaxation of the ruling but it will not be possible to

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allow all the people to use it." He adds that preference will be given to those who owned them in Sarawak as not many in Peninsular Malaysia had them. Owners of parabolic dishes should register with his ministry for the necessary approval.

5.2. Under the Telecommunications Act 1950 (Amendment 1991) owners of parabolic dishes who do not register can, on conviction, be fined RM100,000 or three years' imprisonment, or both.

6. MALAYSIA'S FIRST SATELLITE

6.1 A year after a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed in Langkawi, the fate of Malaysia's first satellite, the Measat-1 or Malaysia East Asia Satellite still hangs in the air.

6.2 Binariang Sdn Bhd is the implementor of the project that will see both Measat-1 and a sister satellite launched by the end of 1994.

The Malaysia Business magazine quoting industry sources in its November issue says the slow going could be due to the unavailability of space segments. "They (Binariang) have not reserved a space that we know of," one industry source has been quoted as saying. Binariang officials, however, insisted that the satellite will be launched on schedule.

6.3 Indeed, Energy, Telecommunications and Posts Minister Datuk Seri S Samy Vellu has said that Malaysia's appli-

cation for a satellite slot had received initial approval from the UN-affiliated ITU (International Telecommunications Union).

- 6.4 It may not be that simple, as space apparently is quite crowded. Almost all commercial communications satellites are in geosynchronous orbit about 23,000km above the earth. The geostationary orbit ensures that the satellite remains at roughly the same spot from Earth at all times.

There are other orbital arcs but they are more elliptical, rather than circular in shape - meaning the satellite could orbit as close as 400 miles or so to the surface of the earth. Satellites in these other orbits are mainly used for defence, surveillance or imaging purposes.

- 6.5 Everyone, it seems, wants to have an eye in the sky.

An informed source says, "It's a useful thing to own, enabling one to get a foot in the door in the fast developing telecommunications industry." In such a case, the laws of supply and demand apply. Aspiring satellite owners and operators apply for positions in the orbital arc, called 'slots', on a 'first come, first served' basis, to the ITU. Within the ITU is the IFRB (International Frequency Radio Board), which regulates the frequencies on which satellites transmit to ensure that one satellite's signal does not interfere with another's.

Logically, Measat-1 should be overhead. Industry ob-

servers say that lots of other countries are also applying for similar position. "They may have to 'buy a slot," says one industry analyst.

6.6 Binariang officials refute the suggestion, saying that they (via the Malaysian government) have applied, and are first in line for a slot at 91.5 degree East for Measat-1. This slot reservation has been recognised and published by the IFRB on Sept 22, 1992. Applications have also been made for two other slots.

Even so, Binariang, or rather the Malaysian government, may have to negotiate with the Indian and CIS governments which have satellites on either side of 91.5 degrees East to ensure that the satellites operate smoothly. Industry observers say the situation up there 'is quite packed' with satellites jostling for position 'within 2 degrees to 3 degrees of each other' - thus, interference can occur. A mutual understanding between the governments, they say, will have to be worked out.

6.7 Satellites are big business. Operators currently lease transponders at around US\$1-1.5 million per transponder per year. In Binariang's case, that's a nice US\$36 million per year (if it leases out its full complement of 24 transponders), not to mention the hefty fees likely to come its way on an ad hoc basis, such as the transmission of such events as the 1998 Commonwealth Games which Malaysia is playing host.

Still, industry sources say that satellites do not make

money - at least not in the first five years of operation. Example: Australia's Aussat apparently has yet to break even (someone here might be able to confirm this). Binariang officials reckon that the company will only break even in the sixth year. And returns on investment are said to be modest - the company is expecting about 10 per cent air time.

7. SATELLITE FOR DEFENCE SYSTEM

7.1 The launching of Malaysia's first satellite end of next year, will not only be for communications but also to upgrade the country's defence system and improve security.

The satellite will be able to provide information on the country's air defence and security. It will also serve the police force.

7.2 The Royal Malaysian Air Force (RMAF) is eager to use the satellite Measat-1 as part of the Armed Forces modernisation programme. However, the RMAF will do so if the security of the country is not breached in the process says Air Force chief Lt Jen Datuk Seri Haji Mohamed Yunus Tasi.

The RMAF has to consider several aspects of the satellite system before using it.

"There are aspects we must consider and the most important is security as we cannot have a communication system which is accessible to everybody."

He adds the use of the satellite by the RMAF was still in the planning stage.

7.3 Defence Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak had earlier announced that Malaysia will buy the RM700 million "Marthello" radar to be installed in the three main bases in the country to upgrade the country's air defence. The radar system will be comparable to that used by the big powers and its wider air surveillance capability would enable the Royal Malaysian Air Force to identify foreign planes crossing into Malaysia's corridor.

7.4 The Malaysian satellite, "Messat-1" will also enable the country to have a network of value-added services to receive more information in various fields from other countries.

Licensed telecommunications companies providing paging and cellular telephone services will also benefit with the launching of the satellite.

8. BERNAMA HARNESSES SATELLITE TECHNOLOGY

8.1 Bernama ushered the new year with yet another step forward in its delivery of news and information services. The national news agency will harness satellite technology to distribute its services nationwide, the project coming through as it prepares to celebrate its Silver Jubilee anniversary in May.

8.2 Transmission involves the use of Telekom Malaysia's VSAT (Very Small Aperture Terminal). Bernama will be the first user of the facility in the country.

In the first phase, the new system will carry several of the agency's services to its bureaus in all the states. Satellite dishes measuring 1.8 metres in diameter are being installed, and that they will be commissioned this year.

The satellite service will enable all Bernama services to be transmitted at the speed of 9600 bauds per second (bps), eight times faster than is possible now.

It will enable Bernama services to be delivered to practically every part of the country, economically and reliably.

8.3 The satellite service will phase out the existing eight-year old Bercom terrestrial network which is no longer adequate in terms of its capacity, reliability and cost-effectiveness.

The new service makes use of the Palapa satellite and the Telekom Malaysia earth station in Wangsa Maju and satellite dishes in all the remote locations.

Bernama's bureaus will be able to use the service to despatch news items while the network could also be used to send the agency's array of financial information services.

The fact that the VSAT facility covers the region is to Bernama's gain. The agency can distribute its news despatch to embassies in areas difficult to reach

communication-wise, such as Pekan Baru and Pontianak in Indonesia, and also Vietnam and Laos.

9. TVRO FOR HOTELS

9.1 Hotel operators in the country can now apply for +Television Receiver Only+ (TVRO) licences to enable them to receive 24-hour Cable News Network (CNN) news broadcasts. With the availability of CNN news in hotel, tourists would now be able to keep in touch with international news round the clock.

The TVRO licences, however, will be restricted to three-star hotels upwards. According to Samy Vellu the public should be able to receive TVRO broadcasts when the country's satellite is launched next year.

9.2 With the installation of the TVRO these hotels will be able to receive Subscription News Service (SNS) uncensored from CNN (Cable News Network) and from two Star TV channels for their guests.

9.3 The government has yet to allow the public to have direct access to satellite television for "security and moral reasons." "However, the Government will try to fulfil the people's needs for SNS information through joint-venture between RTM and the private sector," says Information Minister Mohamed Rahmat.

9.4 It is estimated that the hardware, including the transmitter and decoder facility, will cost more than RM100 million if the service is provided to the whole coun-

try. It is envisaged that the project will be available to the hotels by June and to the public by next year.

10 SUBSCRIPTION NEWS SERVICE

10.1 The Subscription News Service (SNS), to be launched in 1994, will telecast programmes from the Cable News Network (CNN) and Star TV of Hong Kong. The Information Ministry officials are currently negotiating with the two stations to acquire the rights to rebroadcast the programmes. The Hong Kong television station telecast BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) news as well as sports.

10.2 The SNS will provide an opportunity for the people to view foreign TV programmes without the need to install parabolic dishes. To receive the service, TV owners must be subscribers and install decoders to their sets to enable their sets to pick up the signals to be transmitted nationwide. The service will be transmitted via RTM and like TV subscription service, the people will have to pay monthly fees. The government will ensure that the majority of the people will be able to receive the service.

10.2 The SNS programmes would be transmitted 18 hours daily via three Channels - the first channel would deal with foreign news and documentaries, second would cover entertainment and the third channel, movies and sports. The cost of implementing the service throughout the

whole country would amount to RM100 million and the government would call for tenders soon from those interested in the private sector. Officials say the government has agreed to have the SNS to provide an opportunity to the people to get information and to +overcome the issue involving the rights of the people to follow foreign transmissions via satellite.

11. SEVEN TV CHANNELS

11.1 Malaysia is expected to have seven television channels by the year 2000, with five of the stations to be run by the government and the rest by the private sector.

The number of radio stations is expected to increase from 19 to 47 and two of them would be run by Redifusion, a local broadcasting company.

11.3 And as we are deliberating here tender for the second private TV station, TV4, is being closed. The deadline for application for the station has been set for Feb 2. TV4 is expected to begin operation in 1994. The other private TV station, TV3, is run by Sistem Televisyen Malaysia Berhad.

Three TV channels to be run by the government would be +Infortainment+ services while the additional radio stations would cater for state and district programmes.

12. CONCLUSION

Whether the government or Malaysians like it or not, the advance of satellite broadcast is here to stay as the country gears towards becoming a full fledged industrialised nation by the year 2020. What more when the government itself is actively involved in a project to upgrade the communications infrastructure and other facilities towards making the capital city of Kuala Lumpur the regional centre for media and communications for Asia.

It is obvious that the Malaysian broadcasting authorities will in the coming years be having a much more difficult task in striking a balance between its role of protecting the people from an invasion of what it calls "immoral" TV programmes and the question not wanting to be left out of the advancement of more sophisticated global satellite communications development.