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Paper No. 21
BROADCASTING IN SINGAPORE

Radio and Television Singapore (RTS)

Broadcasting began in Singapore with the introduction of radio in 1936. In 1963, monochrome television was introduced on Channel 5 of the Radio and Television Singapore (RTS), a government department under the Ministry of Culture. A few months later, Channel 8 was launched.

Singapore Broadcasting Corporation

On 1 February 1980, RTS was transformed into the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) through an Act of Parliament to provide it with greater autonomy and flexibility in personnel, financial and production matters. This change was essential to nurture creativity and to develop a modern broadcasting organisation geared to meet the entertainment and information needs of Singapore audiences.

As the nation's broadcaster, SBC introduced new TV formats and better quality programmes, such as current affairs. It also introduced locally produced programmes. The Mandarin variety shows were first telecast in May 1981 and Chinese drama made its debut in 1983.

In January 1984, a third channel, Channel 12 was launched to provide an extra dimension in television programming. Channel 12 carved a special niche for itself among Singaporeans with its quality documentaries, cultural performances, dramas, art house movies, as well as children's educational programmes and sports. In January 1994, it started to broadcast Malay programmes as well.

With the proliferation of radio stations in the region, SBC moved into formatted radio stations in 1989 to better meet the listening needs of its audiences. Its 10 radio channels provide programming in the four official languages. An external radio service, Radio Singapore International (RSI) was launched on 1 February 1994 and broadcasts regionally in English, Malay and Mandarin.

Corporatisation of Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC)

In recent years, the increasing affluence and the diversity of audience needs have encouraged the growth of satellite TV, pay TV and cable TV. These developments bring about an abundance of choice and a much more competitive
environment. Traditional broadcasters will now have to compete for viewership and the advertising dollar not only with satellite and cable TV operators but also other multi-media and video-on-demand providers. It was against such a backdrop that the Government decided to privatise SBC as a means of enabling the organisation to better meet new challenges ahead.

On 1 October 1994, SBC was corporatised, the first major step to being privatised. Four operating subsidiaries under a holding company, the Singapore International Media (SIM), were formed. The corporatisation allows SBC’s successor companies to operate more flexibly and spurs them on to lower costs and higher standards of programming. In its place, a new statutory board, the Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA) was set up to regulate the broadcasting industry and oversee the role of public broadcasting in Singapore.

Today, there are seven private local broadcasting stations which are licensed by SBA. Three of the stations are under the holding company of SIM. They are the Television Corporation of Singapore (TCS), the Television Twelve (TV 12) and the Radio Corporation of Singapore (RCS). The other four stations are NTUC Radio Heart, SAFRA Radio Singapore Cable Vision and Rediffusion.

Free-To-Air Television

Television Corporation of Singapore (TCS)

TCS owns and manages two channels, namely Channels 5 and 8. Channel 5 carries English mass entertainment and information programmes, including English productions. It plans to explore more local drama productions and more comedies. Channel 8 focuses on the Mandarin entertainment and information productions. It aims to consolidate its strengths in local programmes and make them relevant to Singapore viewers. TCS maintains a market share of over 80% of home audience.

Television Twelve (TV 12)

TV 12 operates two channels, Prime 12 and Premiere 12. Prime 12 carries Malay and Tamil programmes while Premiere 12 focuses on special interest programmes such as culture, sports, arthouse movies, children’s programmes and documentaries.
Subscription Television

Singapore CableVision (SCV)

SCV launched its first UHF subscription television service on 2 April 1992 with NewsVision, a CNN-based news channel which offered 14 hours live coverage of CNN International News. In June 1992, two other channels were introduced: MovieVision, an English-language channel offering 24 hours of uninterrupted movies from Home Box Office Asia; and VarietyVision, an all-Mandarin channel which features dramas, movies, cartoons and documentaries from major programme suppliers in Hong Kong, Japan, China and Taiwan.

In June 1995, SCV was licensed by SBA to operate the cable television service. At present, SCV provides 17 channels on its basic tier, 8 channels on its international tier and 3 channels in its premium tier, offering a wide range of programmes such as news, educational programmes, documentaries, movies, cartoons, sports and children’s programmes. All 750,000 households in Singapore are expected to be fully wired-up to receive cable television by year 2000.

Free-To-Air Radio

Radio Corporation of Singapore (RCS)

RCS owns and manages ten domestic and three international radio stations covering the four official languages in Singapore. Currently, RCS broadcasts in English on four channels, Mandarin on three channels, Malay on two channels and Tamil on the last channel.

RCS’s external service, Radio Singapore International (RSI), broadcasts to the region, offering a mix of Singapore news, current affairs and entertainment programmes.

NTUC Radio Heart

NTUC Radio Heart was set up by the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC). Its first two channels were launched in March 1991. It broadcasts 24 hours daily in the four official languages. The station offers a wide spectrum of programmes designed to cater to the needs of the working population in Singapore. The music format is adult contemporary. Programmes are presented in magazine format and contains information, music, news and discussions of topical issues.
SAFRA Radio

SAFRA Radio operates two channels, an English and a Chinese station, broadcasting 21 hours daily. Its programmes have a multi-lingual flavour with 80% attributed to music entertainment and 20% to news and information.

Subscription Radio

Rediffusion

Rediffusion operates a commercial audio broadcasting system over cable throughout Singapore. With a listenership of about 30,000, it broadcasts 18 hours of Mandarin programmes on the Gold Network and 24 hours of English programmes on the Silver Network.
SINGAPORE BROADCASTING AUTHORITY

ROLES AND FUNCTIONS

1. The Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA) was set up on 1 October 1994 under the SBA Act 1994 as a Statutory Board under the Ministry of Information and The Arts. This Act provided for the corporatisation of the national broadcaster, the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation, and the formation of a new statutory board to regulate and promote the broadcasting industry in Singapore.

2. The functions of SBA are:

   a. To license and regulate broadcasting services, with powers to grant, renew, cancel and modify broadcasting licences.

   b. To regulate the use of broadcasting apparatus such as satellite dishes and other broadcasting receiving equipment.

   c. To encourage the development of broadcasting and related services through a regulatory framework which is conducive to broadcasters and the broadcasting industry.

   d. To determine the socially desirable level and quality of public service programmes and to contract with broadcasters on such productions.

   e. To establish guidelines on programming quality, balance, range in subject matter and censorship.

   f. To collect and administer licence fees from households and broadcasters.

   g. To liaise with foreign broadcasters and film producers to promote and market Singapore as a regional hub.

3. SBA is concerned chiefly with the regulation of broadcast content. Regulation of broadcast delivery systems is undertaken by the Telecommunications Authority of Singapore.
REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

4 The SBA Act 1994 provides a framework which enables the Authority to regulate broadcast contents in the face of new commercial and technological realities. An example can be seen in the wider definition of "broadcasting", which enables SBA to regulate electronic transmissions going out to the public beyond traditional radio and TV services. SBA is thereby empowered to regulate new forms of information transmission, such as the services delivered on the information superhighway.

5 We define "broadcasting services" to mean:

"A service whereby signs or signals transmitted, whether or not encrypted, comprising:

* any programme capable of being received, or received and displayed, as visuals images, whether moving or still;
* any sound programme for reception; or
* any programme, being a combination of both visual image (whether moving or still) and sound for reception or reception and display,

by persons having equipment appropriate for receiving, or receiving and displaying, as the case may be, that service, irrespective of the means of delivery of the service."

6 "Programme" is separately defined to mean:

a. Any matter the primary purpose of which is to entertain, educate or inform all or part of the public; or

b. Any advertising or sponsorship matter, whether or not of a commercial kind, but does not include any matter that is wholly related to or connected with any private communication. That is to say,

* any communication between two or more persons that is of a private or domestic nature;
* any internal communication of a business, government agency or other organisation for the purpose of the operation of the business, agency or organisation; and
* communications in such other circumstances as may be prescribed."
7. The types of broadcasting services which are licensable under the SBA Act include:
   a. Free-to-air television and radio services
   b. Subscription television and radio services
   c. Special interest television and radio services
   d. Audiotext, videotext and teletext services
   e. Video-on-demand services
   f. Broadcast data services

8. Broadcasting services with major impact on society, like nationwide radio and television, will be individually licensed, with conditions on programme content as well as programming mix.

9. With the widened definition of broadcasting, SBA has to guard against over-regulating the industry. We have therefore introduced a class licence approach for some categories of services such as audiotext and electronic data services, which need only "light touch" regulation against objectionable content. Under the class licence scheme, service providers will be deemed to be licensed by SBA so long as they comply with gazetted licence conditions for the class. They do not need to be individually licensed by SBA.

10. SBA also licenses and regulates the sale and use of television receivers and broadcast receiving apparatus. The annual licence fee is $110 for a colour television set, $40 for a monochrome television set and $27 for a vehicle radio receiver. The TVRO fee is $1000 per annum. SBA issues TVRO licences to businesses whose applications are supported by EDB, MAS, TDB or MITA and to embassies supported by MFA.

OWNERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT CONTROLS

11. Major broadcasting companies, for example nationwide radio and television stations, are subject to ownership and management controls similar to those imposed on newspaper companies. Companies must seek SBA's approval for shareholding above 3% and receipt of funds from foreign sources. The limit of foreign ownership of broadcast companies is 49%. There are no restrictions on cross-media ownership.

PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTS AND PROGRAMME STANDARDS

12. All broadcasters in Singapore are subject to SBA's programme and advertising codes which protect our value system. These codes specify guidelines on violence, treatment of religion, race and sex; and safeguard against misleading advertising, and are issued to all broadcasters. They are required to comply with the standards set and to exercise self-censorship.
13. SBA also sets guidelines on programming mix. We want to ensure that programmes broadcast provide balance and variety so as to be able to meet the needs of our heterogeneous population. Furthermore, television programmes should not only entertain, but also inform and educate.

14. SBA specifies in the broadcasters' licences the minimum levels of public service broadcasts (PSBs) which they are required to carry at their own cost. SBA also commissions broadcasters to broadcast PSBs over and above the minimum levels. These are known as the "additional PSBs" which are paid for by SBA (from licence fees and a small grant from the government) based on contractual agreement with the broadcasters. Public service broadcasts include news, current affairs, info-educational, cultural, sports, minority languages and children's programmes.

15. There have been concerns in the past from the public and members of Parliament that privatisation of our national broadcasting stations will lead to over-commercialisation and hence a decrease in public service programmes. One of SBA's key tasks is to guard against such over-commercialisation. For a start, we have sought to ensure, through our licence conditions, that the SBC-successor companies maintain the level of public service programme output they carried prior to corporatisation.

16. SBA also consults the following independent advisory bodies in monitoring programme standards and establishing the optimal level of public service programmes:

a. Programme Advisory Committee (PAC) - The PAC advises SBA on programme and censorship standards for programmes and commercials on television and radio. It also gives inputs on the range and quality of public service programmes. The PAC has five Special Interest Sub-committees which examine the selection of scheduling of television and radio programmes under their purview. They are the Info-educational, Children, Culture, Sports and Entertainment Sub-committees.

b. Advisory Committee on Indian Television and Radio Programmes

c. Advisory Committee on Chinese Entertainment Programmes (ACCESS)

17. SBA will also be commissioning surveys and convening discussion groups to get a more accurate feel of grassroots sentiment on programming issues. We are presently working with the People's Association to reach out to a representative sampling of people for the discussion groups.
BROADCASTERS IN SINGAPORE

There are seven local broadcasters in Singapore. They are the Television Corporations of Singapore (TCS), Television Twelve (TV12), Singapore CableVision (SCV), Radio Corporation of Singapore (RCS), Radio Heart, SAFRA Radio and Rediffusion. The only free-to-air foreign station here is the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) World Service.

Singapore International Media (SIM) is the holding company of a group of local broadcasting firms, including TCS, RCS, TV12 and SIM Communications (which provides all transmission and distribution services for broadcasters in Singapore). SIM’s aim is to establish Singapore as a leader in regional broadcasting and communications. SIM has plans to go into co-production ventures with established production companies and broadcasters. It has a regional and international focus to widen the scope of its activities to include telecommunications and multimedia services. It will also be exploring and investing in new areas of business which, though outside its core broadcast business, will draw on its technical and programming expertise to complement its strength in broadcasting.

Free-To-Air Television

a) Television Corporation of Singapore Pte Ltd (TCS) owns and manages two channels, namely Channels 5 and 8. Channel 5 carries English mass entertainment and information programmes, including local English productions. It plans to explore more local drama productions and more comedies. Channel 8 focuses on the Mandarin and Tamil entertainment and information productions. It aims to consolidate on its strength in local programmes and make them relevant to Singapore viewers. TCS maintains a market share of over 80% of the home audience.

b) Television Twelve (TV12) operates Channel 12 which provides special interest programmes. The company’s focus is on producing high quality documentaries, cultural, sports, arthouse movies as well as children’s educational programmes. TV12 will be launching a second channel, known as Premier 12, on 1 September 1995 to provide more programming (including Malay, Tamil and other foreign languages) on prime time to its niche audience. The current channel will be renamed Prime 12.
Subscription Television

21 Singapore CableVision Pte Ltd (SCV) launched its first UHF subscription television service on 2 April 1992 with NewsVision, a CNN-based news channel which offered 14 hours of uncensored and live coverage of CNN International News. In June 1992, two other channels were introduced: MovieVision, an English-language channel offering 24 hours of uninterrupted movies from Home Box Office Asia; and VarietyVision, an all-Mandarin channel which features dramas, movies, cartoons and documentaries from major programme suppliers in Hong Kong, Japan, China and Taiwan.

SCV has also been licensed to operate the cable television service from 1 June 1995. All 750,000 households in Singapore are expected to be fully wired-up to receive cable television by the year 2000. SCV intends to offer an even greater choice and variety of programmes by providing about 30 to 50 channels on news, educational programmes, documentaries, movies, cartoons, sports and children’s programmes.

SCV is a consortium led by SIM (31%), US-based Continental Cablevision (25%), Singapore Technologies Ventures (24%) and Singapore Press Holdings (20%).

Free-To-Air Radio

22 a) Radio Corporation of Singapore (RCS) owns and manages ten domestic and three international radio stations covering the four official languages in Singapore. It aims to be the premier radio broadcaster in the country and the region, serving multi-racial and multi-cultural audiences with a wide spectrum of programming formats. These programmes should echo the cosmopolitan outlook of Singapore, while reflecting Singapore’s cultural heritage.

b) NTUC Radio Heart was set up by the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC). Its first two channels were launched in March 1991. It broadcasts 24 hours daily in the four official languages. The station offers a wide spectrum of programmes designed to cater to the needs of the working population in Singapore. The music format is adult contemporary. Programmes are presented in magazine format and contains information, music, news and discussions of topical issues. Radio Heart will be seeking expansion and new radio programming through collaboration with other international radio stations.
c) SAFRA Radio first launched its English station Power 98FM in October 1994. It operates 18 hours daily from 6.00am to 12.00 midnight. Its programmes have a multi-lingual flavour with 80% attributed to music entertainment and 20% to news and information, such as international, regional and local news or defence-related news. It launched its second station, in Chinese, in June 1995.

d) BBC World Service is the only foreign free-to-air radio station in Singapore. It operates one FM channel here and uses Singapore as the base for its short-wave relays to the region.

Subscription Radio

Rediffusion operates a commercial audio broadcasting system over cable throughout Singapore. With a listenership of about 30,000, it broadcasts 18 hours of Mandarin programmes on the Gold Network and 24 hours of English programmes on the Silver Network.

Satellite Broadcasters

Satellite broadcasters uplinking from Singapore include:

a) Asia Business News (ABN) which broadcasts financial news in English and Mandarin from Singapore 24 hours on weekdays and 12 hours on weekends. The uplink is via Palapa B2P satellite.

b) Home Box Office (HBO) Asia, the Asian flagship of HBO, a US movie cable network. Its headquarters is in Singapore with facilities equipped for full post-production work. Their programmes are broadcast in English with subtitles in both Thai and Mandarin.

c) Singapore International TV (SITV), which offers an hour-long satellite broadcast service on Singapore’s news, current affairs, financial issues and entertainment and is uplinked via Palapa B2P.

d) Walt Disney Television (Singapore) Ltd’s first channel, the Taiwan Disney Channel, which is a 24-hour Mandarin-dubbed and subtitled channel providing movies, animation and entertainment specials. By the end of 1995, Walt Disney will launch two more channels, one for the Indian market and a Disney movie channel.

e) Golden Eagle Communications Ltd (GEC), an Indian broadcast company using ST Teleport’s new uplink facility to beam its programmes via RIMSAT 2 to South Asia. It broadcasts quality Tamil general entertainment programmes as well as those for children and youth.
f) MTV Asia LDC (MTV Asia), which operates one 24-hour English music-based programme service and another 24-hour Mandarin music-based programmes service.

g) Channel K (CKTV), which provides two 24-hour dedicated karaoke channels, one in Mandarin and the other in Cantonese, via Ku band on PanAmSat 2 which covers North Asia including Hong Kong, Taiwan and China.

h) ESPN Asia (S) Pte Ltd, launched in June 1995, which transmits three 24-hour networks exclusively dedicated to sporting events and sport-related programmes for India, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Southeast Asia. The uplink is via Palapa B2P, PanAmSat 4 and Apstar 1.

i) The Discovery Channel (TDC), a 24-hour non-fiction entertainment service featuring documentary programming on subjects such as science and technology, nature, world history, human adventure and world cultures. The uplink is via Palapa B2P, APSTAR 1 and PanAmSat 2, which generally extends from China to Australia and New Zealand and to parts of India.

j) Asia Television Network Ltd (ATN), a cable and satellite operator in India using ST Teleport’s new uplink facility to beam its programmes via RIMSAT 2 to India and South Asia. It broadcasts quality Hindi entertainment programmes, such as music and films.

k) Sun Television from India, which owns four television channels with regionally segmented target audiences in India. Three of them are general entertainment channels featuring programmes such as movies, talk shows, music videos and game shows. The fourth is a North Indian Hindi and English-language channel which offers business, current affairs and general entertainment programmes.

NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Video-On-Demand

25 Singapore Telecom plans to run trials for a video-on-demand service in late 1995. This service will allow viewers to select what they want to watch from a wide array of programming at their convenience. They will be able to control their viewing, for example by fast forwarding and rewinding a selected programme. Other possible interactive services such as banking, home shopping and distance learning may be introduced in the future.
Internet

26 Users in Singapore can access the Internet through Singnet or Technet. Singnet is operated by Singapore Telecom, while Technet is run by Pacific Internet. The Telecommunications Authority of Singapore will be issuing a licence to the third Internet access provider later this year.

27 SBA is currently looking into drawing up a regulatory framework for Internet. In so doing, SBA will have to strike a balance between the promotion of its development and safeguarding of our value system.

BROADCAST TECHNICAL CONDITIONS

28 SBA is charged with the responsibility to ensure that broadcast services are delivered at an acceptable standard. In this respect, SBA imposes transmission area requirements as well as picture quality standards on broadcasters. SBA administers a broadcast standards code which specifies transmission standards to maintain a minimum standard in broadcast signals.

29 To ensure good reception of broadcasting services, SBA can require the developer or owner of a building to provide, at his own expense, facilities of an acceptable standard to SBA for the reception of certain broadcast services. For instance, SBA is legislating a requirement for all new high-rise residential buildings to be cable-ready. This will cut down on the need to re-wire buildings when the cable network, with its accompanying TV and IT services, reaches them. This will speed up the wiring of the whole country which is targeted to be completed by year 2000 and promote the development of the information superhighway.

30 SBA has also encouraged SCV to adopt a 100% drop-wiring approach in high-rise residential buildings so that new subscribers can be quickly connected to the network at minimal inconvenience. SCV will negotiate with owners of these buildings to take over the maintenance of their master antennae systems, in exchange for which it will supply the local free-to-air television services to all residential units in the building, regardless of whether they are cable TV subscribers.

PROMOTION OF THE BROADCASTING INDUSTRY

31 SBA aims to provide broadcasters with a conducive regulatory environment to operate. We act as a one-stop service centre to facilitate their operations. We coordinate with the relevant authorities, such as the Economic Development Board and the Telecommunication Authority of Singapore for approvals on behalf of the broadcasters. This helps to create a conducive environment for broadcasters to operate here.
32. Singapore welcomes foreign broadcasting services to set up their operations here. This is in line with the government's policy to make Singapore a regional information and broadcasting hub. We aim to give broadcasters clear and consistent guidelines. This is to give them assurance on the framework under which they operate, while balancing it with the need to safeguard concerns on objectionable programming. Another incentive for satellite broadcasters is that they can either operate their own facilities or use common carriers like SIMCOM, ST Teleport and Singapore Telecoms.

33. SBA also keeps track of developments in broadcast technology in its effort to promote the development of the broadcast industry. As technology brings broadcasting, telecommunications and computing together, SBA will have to balance regulatory concerns on programming with efforts to promote the development of Singapore as an information hub.