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Country Reports - Radio and Television Brunei

RTB - The History, The Present and The

INTRODUCTION: A BRIEF HISTRY

The history of broadcasting media in Negara Brunei Darussalam started with the formation of radio service in May 1957 and Television service in 1975 as a medium of communication, information and entertainment. Both radio and television stations are owned, run and financed by government. In 1999 a private company DST Communications started its Kristal Service and Kristal Astro in early 2000. Kristal redistributed 14 channels television programming and 4 channels of radio services. Kristal Astro is a joint venture of Kristal and a Malaysian based company Astro and launched its service in early 2000. Kristal Astro provided 25 channels television and 13 channels radio programming.

With the current development and technological changes it was deemed necessary for the government to control the programme content of the public and private station in the country. Thus the introduction of Brunei Emergency (Broadcasting) Order 1997 and Brunei Broadcasting (Code of Practice) Notification, 1998.

The limited availability of information and time to search for material from the private sector mentioned above, the writer focussed the write-up on the public radio and television station that is Radio Television Brunei (RTB) as described below.

Radio

Broadcasting at a frequency 242.1 megaHertz a voice filled the airwaves and proudly announced, "Inilah Radio Brunei". The announcement marked the birth of Radio Brunei. During the early days, Radio Brunei broadcast from its first station a temporary studio converted out of a former store room of the Weights and Measures Department in Bandar Seri Begawan, then called Bandar Brunei (Brunei Town). Initially, transmission could only be heard by people living within a five mile radius from the transmitter site. However, even with a limited coverage, the people were able to receive clear, crisp signals. Broadcast was limited to only two and a quarter hours a day from 7.30 to 9.45 in the evening with Malay programming occupying one and a half hours and English broadcasts occupying three quarters of an hour.

Shortly after its inaugural broadcast, radio started to catch the attention and interest of the majority of the Brunei's populace. The studios and administration was moved to the new building and the department later known as Department of Broadcasting Brunei.

As part of an active expansion program, the Tutong transmitter was set up in 1958. The new transmitter boosted broadcast coverage to include the Tutong and Belait districts. It was also this time that the first Chinese programme went on air. This signalled the start of the three language broadcasting on Radio Brunei.

In 1962 another station was established in Kuala Belait. Broadcasting at 660 watts, the station catered exclusively to radio listeners in Kuala Belait and Seria.
The era of the seventies brought a lot of challenges for radio. In 1975 along with television (just being introduced then) the two forms of media were integrated and placed under a separate governing body. That body came to be known Department of Radio Television Brunei (RTB).

Television

RTB television service, which is on the PAL 625 system, started terrestrial transmission in July 1975. Current local production has been stepped up to 65 percent as to 35 percent of overseas programmes mostly from United Kingdom, United States of America, Australia and also ASEAN countries.

It telecasts programmes in Malay everyday from 6.00 am to 10.00 and 4.00 pm to 12 midnight on weekdays and from 6.00 am to 12 midnight on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Early transmission also on special public holidays.

In the past RTB received its foreign news films via Singapore where they were recorded from the Indian Ocean satellite and flown daily to Bandar Seri Begawan. As part of its efforts to widen news sources RTB participates in the Asiavision news exchange programme arranged by the Asian Broadcasting Union. Thus more regional news from neighbouring countries can be viewed. RTB also obtains visual material on current affairs from UPTIN and subscribes to Reuters, UPI and Visnews.

In January 1995 RTB introduced an hour daily satellite channel service using a leased full time transponder on the newly commissioned Palapa C 1 satellite. Since April 1996 RTB increased its satellite service transmission to ten and a half hours daily from 6.00 am to 10.00 am and from 4.00 pm till 10.25 pm which can be received by most of the ASEAN countries and some northern part of Asia. Programmes transmitted are all locally produced programmes.

On the 9th July 2000, RTB celebrated 25 years of television service. The ceremony was honoured by the present His Royal Highness the Crown Prince. The themes of the anniversary, whilst looking back to a proud launch of 25 years ago, was to hail the future in which RTB will move to an era of digital terrestrial television broadcasting and Digital Audio Broadcast (DAB).

THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Overview

The Director of RTB is responsible to the Prime Minister through a Permanent Secretary in the Prime Minister's Office.

RTB staffs are civil servants and its management is in accordance with General Orders and Government rules and regulations issued from time to time.

The Management Committee
The Management Committee is responsible for the overall performance of the Department. It also acts as a channel for disseminating policies from higher authorities and monitors their implementation. It formulates and monitors strategies for the Department and deals with major personnel issues such as career development and disciplinary action. It meets weekly and is chaired by Director.

Members of the committee are:

2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10.

MISSION

The Director
The Deputy Director,
The Administrative Officer
The Superintendent Engineer
The Head of Programmes
The Head of News, Current Affairs and Sports
The Head of Radio
The Head of Training and Research
The Head of Enterprise
The Head of International Public Relation.

The mission of the Department is to inform, educate and entertain the public.

Mission Statements

The mission of RTB is to project and broaden civic and social awareness and understanding based on national political and sociocultural values on the basis of Melayu-Islam-Beraja or Malay-MoslemMonarchy principles.

RTB accomplish its unique purpose by striving for excellence in its operation and ensure cost effectiveness in its undertaking by utilising the latest technology where relevant to enhance its services.

RTB provides services to domestic as well as regional audience.

The principles we intend to observe in our relationships with audience and stakeholders are by maintaining a high standard of service through upgrading the skill and know-how our human resources so as to stimulate innovative and creative thinking and programming.

The RTB philosophy includes 'Sentiasa Bersama Biskita' or always to be with you.
GOALS

In fulfilling its mission, RTB's undertakes to pursue the following goals:

1. To enable the public to know and understand government policies.
2. To promote better relationship between the Government and the people.
3. To promote and maintain the development of socio-politic, socio-economic, art and culture of Negara Brunei Darussalam.
4. To project and broaden civic and social awareness and understanding based on national political and socio-cultural values on the basis of Melayu-Islam-Beraja or Malay-Moslem-Monarchy principles.
5. To reflect the foreign policy of Negara Brunei Darussalam.
6. To act as a link between Brunei Darussalam and international community through International Broadcasting Institutions and Organisation.
7. To provide a high standard of service to its through TV and Radio Programs.
8. To develop and provide a varied range of services within the Department's guidelines in line with changing audience needs.
9. To strive for excellence in its operation and ensure cost effectiveness in its undertakings by utilising the latest technology.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS: technology and production

In response to the competitive environment, RTB already effected some changes such as below:

Radio - Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB)

In January 1996, Radio Brunei management decided to introduce three new network in addition to the current two networks and renamed them according to its programming and target listeners.

Rangkaian Nasional (National Network)
Rangkaian Pilihan: English and Mandarin
Rangkaian Pelangi
Rangkaian Harmoni
Rangkaian, Nur Islam

The on-air radio transmission chain for these five existing RTB network radio services is almost entirely digital. Exceptions on this are the input to the microwave link and five optimod analogue audio processors which, being new at the time, were carried over the previous installation. Almost 70 percent of the programmes are aired through all five transmission studios in which equipped with computers.
Radio: Local programming

Despite stiffening competition from satellite programming RT13 Radio programmes are still popular with each of the five services filling an appropriate niche.

Television: Technical Development

New RTB Studio Complex

It is hope that the project to build a new studio complex will the go-ahead within the period of the current 5 years economic plan.

Transmitter Project

RTB’s replacement transmitter programme is now largely completed with the installation of Rhode and Schwartz solid state transmitters. The transmission capabilities now include potential for a second TV channel and NICAM stereo sound. The project to upgrade the five FM stereo radio networks is partially complete and three channels are now operational at 5Kw.

The experimental 300W DAB transmitter included in the project will be operational from the Bukit Subok transmitting site by the end of October 2000.

The transmitter project is complemented by a new studio to transmitter link system that greatly enhances the potential for outgoing and incoming links.

Satellite improvements include the facility to uplink one programme using SCPC or 6 programmes using MCPC to AsiaSat 2.

New Outside Broadcast Vehicle

RTB is currently commissioning a new 8 camera digital OB vehicle, which will be deployed for the first time in connection with the APEC Summit in November 2000.

Television: Local programming

Local television continues to maintain its strong local cultural and development stance against a backdrop of increasing competition from the commercial satellite services that expended to include the Malaysian based Astro service - Kristal Astro.
THE FUTURE

Nearly five decades of radio and three decades of television services, RTB like many other national broadcasters around this region, is facing a challenging and changing broadcasting climate. The introduction of new technology makes possible the satellite radio and television programmes that leaves countries borderless.

As programming becomes more aggressive and competitive, RTB should continuously examine its present roles and adapt or adjust to the dramatic changes in the environment. In view of the dynamic changes that are taking place in the broadcasting environment within and outside the country, RTB is in the process or reassessing its organisational structure and strategies. It is imperative that RTB should look for a NEW DIRECTION.

In line with Government economic policy of diversification and industrialisation the need to move from public to private sectors to generate revenues is encouraged. Advertising and commercials has been increased in the public radio and television station to reduce expenditure. Government also encourage broadcasting station to privatise some of its services to be efficiently and effectively managed.

The new technology will definitely force all broadcasting stations including RTB to move to the era of digital terrestrial broadcasting and digital audio broadcast.

The technology changed will also affect the management approach in the following matters of its particular strengths.

- Government Backing - Political
- Local Programming - News, Current Affairs, Documentary
- Mufti Skilling / Specialist Skill
- Statewide Coverage
- Privatisation some services/ Strategic partners
- International Networking
- Finance and Revenue

In the future RTB as a public broadcaster has a changing role to play.