

Singapore to get digital radio broadcasts

Services to be launched next month; digital TV will come once a system of technology is picked, says BG Yeo

COMMERCIAL radio services using Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) technology, which promises CD-quality sound, will be launched next month, Information and the Arts Minister George Yeo announced yesterday.

Speaking at the opening of the Cable and Satellite Broadcasting Association of Asia (Casbaa) Conference, Brig-Gen (NS) Yeo said Digital Television (DTV) would come later, after the Singapore Broadcasting Authority (SBA) has decided on the system of technology to use.

Singapore had completed trials on the American, European and Japanese systems for DTV and will decide which standard to adopt by March next year.

For audio broadcasts, Singapore has chosen the European Eureka-147 DAB system, which was recommended by the International Telecommunications Union for worldwide adoption.

An SBA official told The Straits Times yesterday that both the Radio Corporation of Singapore and Safra Radio had completed their DAB trials and would decide later when to start broadcasts using the system.

In his speech, BG Yeo also told the 300 delegates from over 20 countries who are attending the three-day conference at Suntec City that Singapore had been working hard to prepare Singaporeans for the digital world.

"Because we have the financial resources, we are stepping up our efforts in IT infrastructural development and education during this economic crisis," he said.

An example was the SingaporeOne project, he said, noting that this was possibly the world's first nationwide electronic network that would deliver interactive multimedia services to every home, school and office by the end of next year.

He added that Singapore has become a broadcasting hub for several satellite broadcasters and programmers and that many of them have set up offices here.

As a multi-racial society, he believed that Singapore is "a microcosm of modern Asia and provides a good test bed for Asian content development".

Sharing this view, the managing director of the Economic Development

DAB: How the system works

DIGITAL Audio Broadcasting (DAB) refers to the complete digitisation of radio signals from transmission to reception.

DAB receivers can have a screen or monitor for pictures or diagrams and text, or just a small display for text. A receiver can also be connected to a personal computer with a special card.

Conventional AM and FM broadcasting uses analog technology, which is prone to interference and distortion. DAB sends out digital signals which give CD quality, interference-free sound.

No tuning is needed; listeners can select programmes by pressing a button. They can also get access to stored information, such as the latest traffic information.

The system can transmit stock market information, weather reports and even live news. It can also be programmed to tell the driver where the nearest petrol kiosk or ATM is, or whether carparks are full.

Listeners can "buy" live broadcasts of concerts and performances overseas, much like video-on-demand, too.

DAB receivers can be installed in cars, buses and even bus stops.

They are expected to be imported here soon, with prices starting at about \$1,000.

Board, Mr Liew Heng San, who hosted lunch for all delegates yesterday, said that Singapore could meet the increasing global demand for "Asianised" programmes because of its unique position, having the best of the East and West.

Some 63 top executives from the industry, including Television Corporation of Singapore president and chief executive officer Lee Cheok Yew, will address the conference.