

Digital radio coming your way

Digital Audio Broadcasting services, which promise CD-quality sound, will be launched commercially by RCS

SINGAPORE will introduce commercial Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB) services, which promise CD-quality sound and multimedia information, this year.

The republic is the first country in Asia to introduce such services, said Minister for Information and the Arts George Yeo yesterday, at the Fourth International DAB Symposium.

The national radio broadcaster, Radio Corporation of Singapore (RCS), will launch the service commercially in six months' time, he said. Four of its 12 existing stations and another channel would be broadcast on one very-high-frequency band.

The stations are: Class 95, YES 93.3, Symphony 92.4, News Radio 93.8 — a new English news and current affairs station — and a showcase channel featuring programmes selected from other RCS stations.

The three-day event organised by the Singapore Broadcasting Authority and the World DAB Forum drew more than 250 participants from 23 countries.

Said Brigadier-General (NS) Yeo: "In Singapore, we will exploit the robustness of DAB signals to provide, in real time, traffic information to individuals on the move, whether in private cars, taxis, buses or trains.

And listeners with DAB sets can tune in now.

Four major industry players — Blaupunkt, Clarion, Kenwood and Pioneer —

are offering DAB car radio receivers for sale here.

SBA chief executive officer Lim Hock Chuan said that the cost of such sets would start at \$1,500, but added that he expected prices to drop rapidly once the technology took off.

BG Yeo said DAB would improve the island-wide system put in place by the Land Transport Authority to collect and provide data on traffic movements.

RCS yesterday signed an agreement with the LTA to use DAB to enhance traffic information to motorists, including TrafficWatch reports with information from the Expressway Monitoring and Advisory System (Emas) and TrafficScan.

RCS will invest a total of \$23 million over five years to develop DAB services.

BG Yeo said DAB also opened up new opportunities for makers of radio receivers. The Centre for Wireless Communications at the National University of Singapore was already involved in efforts to develop DAB receivers which met regional needs, like multi-language displays, he said.

"While DAB receivers are still expensive and not quite portable, the development of a mass consumption market will quickly bring down the size and cost."

He added that a national committee to spearhead and coordinate the use of DAB would soon be formed, and it would be chaired by RCS CEO Anthony Chia.