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And there was television ...

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DURING a trip to Thailand in the early 1960s, Malaysia's first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, brought home a "souvenir" that was to change the lives of Malaysians somewhat.

He had noted "how easily Thai citizens had taken to television". Upon his return, he deliberated on the setting up of a television station in the country.

A special committee headed by Malaya's assistant minister of broadcasting, Tuan (now known as Tan Sri) Syed Ja'afar Albar was formed in May 1960 to study the feasibility of television services, and if so, the possibility of it being introduced by 1962.

The committee comprised heads of the Telecommunications and Broadcasting Department, the Information Services Department and The Malayan Film Unit.

However, financial constraints and the lack of trained personnel (both in engineering and programming fields) were stumbling blocks.

Two experts from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation were recruited in July 1962 to set up the Malayan Television Service. Transmission initially covered only Kuala Lumpur.

The director of broadcasting in Malaya, A.T. Read, had said that with modification, the microwave stations set by the Telecommunications Department could be used for television transmission.

Test transmissions began on Nov 23, 1963. The station was officially launched by Tunku Abdul Rahman on Dec 28, 1963 in Kuala Lumpur.

Malayan Film Unit director Ow Kheng Law was appointed director of the Malaysian Television Service, Raja Iskandar as head of programmes and K.K. Loh as engineer-in-charge.

The station occupied temporary studios in the grounds of Tunku Abdul Rahman Hall on Ampang Road, Kuala Lumpur. The station had only one channel which covered a radius of 15 miles, later extended to 40 miles.

Staff recruitments commenced. Eight broadcasters quit Radio Malaya to join the television service. They were Tan Gek Seam, Tan Mutalib Mohamad, Thomas Matthew, Harjit Singh, James Masang, Syed Alwi, Ahmad Merican and Amir Hamzah.

Among the programmes aired on the first day were a feature on how the Malaysian Television service began, a commentary on future programmes, congratulatory messages from heads of overseas television services who had contributed to the setting up of the station, a feature on the formation of Malaysia, a news commentary and a special feature on Malaysian celebrations.

Initially, the programmes were multi-lingual (Malay, English, Tamil and Chinese) and transmission was from 6.30pm to 9.45pm daily except Saturdays when it went on until 10.30pm).

Below is a chronology of some events that followed:

Feb 1964: The Government imposed an annual license fee of RM24 for television-set owners.

Oct 1964: The Government set aside RM33.4 million for new studios for Malaysian Television Service and Radio Malaysia, to be built on a hill overlooking Pantai Valley on the Kuala Lumpur-Klang road. The move took place in 1968, and Angkasapuri was officially launched.

May 1966: An outside broadcast van equipped with three cameras, costing about RM500,000, was purchased.

March 7, 1968: For the first time, Malaysian Television Service telecast

a recording of the Malaysian Open golf championship.

July 1968: Samurai, a popular Japanese television series, became the first foreign film to be dubbed into Malay.

March 1969: Muzik Muzik Muzik, the first talent search contest for bands, was aired.

1969: Radio and Television Malaysia (formerly known as Malaysian Television Services) was fully integrated to become the Department of Broadcasting).

Nov 17, 1969: A second television channel called Network Two was launched (the premier channel was referred to as Network One).

April 7, 1970: For the first time, television viewers watched a 35-minute live telecast from Japan via satellite. This was a part of a historic exchange of television programmes between Japan and Malaysia.

May 26, 1970: The first children's programme, Pok Amai Amai, began its run.

1971: A contest for solo/group performers, Bakat RTM, was launched.

Dec 27, 1971: RTM Sabah station was officiated by Sabah Chief Minister Tun Datuk Mustapha.

June 19, 1972: Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak launched Education Television Service (ETV), which ran from Mondays to Thursdays.

March 1973: Efforts were undertaken to produce television commercials locally and promote a Malaysian identity in advertising.

Dec 6, 1973: The Royal Wedding of Britain's Princess Anne and Captain Mark Phillips was televised "live".

Jan 1974: The boxing match between Muhammed Ali and Joe Frazier at Madison Square Garden, New York, was telecast.

April 1974: The Government formed an inter-ministerial committee comprising officials from the Ministries of Trade and Industry and Information to study hitches relating to launch of colour television.

1975: Another local talent search competition, this time for solo singers, Bintang RTM, was launched. This contest later unearths the talents of the late Sudirman Haji Arshad, Rosmaria Abdul Hamid, M. Rizal, Rohana Jalil, Ramlah Ram and Juliza Adlizan.

Dec 28 1978: Network One's colour television transmission was launched by Prime Minister Datuk (later Tun) Hussein Onn,

Dec 31, 1981: Network One carried a "live" telecast of the adaptation of the standard Malaysian time; clocks in Peninsular Malaysia were adjusted 30 minutes ahead to be in line with the time in Sabah and Sarawak.

June, July 1982: Soccer-mad Malaysian rakyat pooled their resources in a huge fund-raising project initiated by the afternoon daily, The Malay Mail, called People's Live Telecast Fund. The objective was to screen the 1982 World Cup matches.

Sept 11, 1988: Network One carried the Teleton RTM Sport Aid '88. The station went on air for 24 hours and the public were invited to call and pledge their donations for those suffering from heart and kidney ailments. A total of RM4.8 million was collected.

Dec 25, 1989: Malaysians for the first time witnessed the World Cup (soccer) 1990 draw via a live telecast.

Oct 1990: Network One carried another fundraiser Teleton '90. During the four-day event, Network One had a continuous broadcast and RM5.4 million was raised.

March 1, 1994: RTM started morning TV with daily transmission from 6am. Previously, morning transmission was only on public holidays and weekends.

Sept 16, 1994: RTM carried the live telecast of Malam Karyawan Malaysia, a mega-concert organised by the Badan Bertindak Bosnia and Pena, from the Shah Alam stadium. Contributions were made by local artistes to the Bosnian fund and families of Malaysian soldiers killed in action overseas.