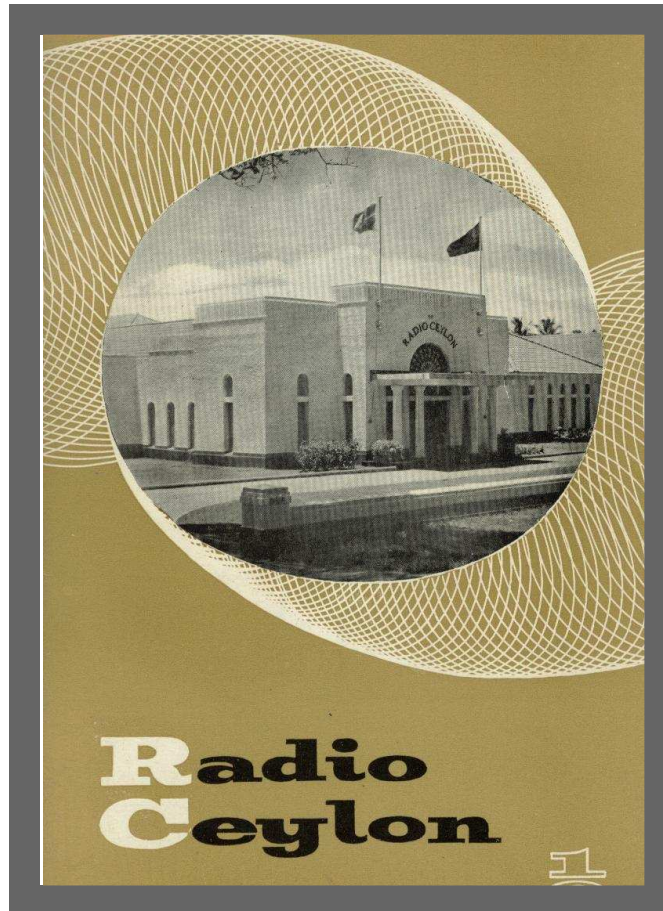


# *Radio Ceylon/Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation*

## *The History of Broadcasting in Sri Lanka*

*Compiled by*

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*Radio Ceylon is the oldest radio station in Asia. Broadcasting was started on an experimental basis in Ceylon by the Telegraph Department in 1923, just three years after the inauguration of broadcasting in Europe.*

*When it comes to the history of broadcasting, Ceylon plays a very important role alongside the United States of America, Great Britain and Germany. Edward Harper who came to Ceylon as Chief Engineer of the Telegraph Office in 1921, was the first person to actively promote broadcasting in Ceylon.*

*In the first ever radio experiments in Colombo, gramophone music was broadcast from a tiny room in the Central Telegraph Office with the aid of a small transmitter built by the Telegraph Department engineers from the radio equipment of a captured German submarine.*

*The experiment was a real success and three years later, on December 16, 1925, a regular broadcasting service came to be instituted in Ceylon - the station was called Colombo Radio with the call sign '**Colombo Calling.**'*

*Harper also founded the Ceylon Wireless Club together with British and Ceylonese radio enthusiasts in the city of Colombo. These were exciting times where radio in South Asia was concerned. Many regard Edward Harper as 'the Father of Broadcasting in Ceylon.'*



### **EDWARD HARPER THE FATHER OF BROADCASTING IN SRI LANKA**

Here are some important chapters in the story of broadcasting in Sri Lanka.

**1926** - The opening of a Concert Studio at the Ceylon University College.

**1927** - The installation of acoustically treated studios and an Engineering Control Room at Torrington Square, Colombo.

**1934** - The constitution of a Wireless Broadcasting Advisory Board. Also, first experiments with a short wave transmission to achieve better reception in areas outside a 40-mile radius of Colombo. Construction of a Receiving Station for the reception of Empire Programmes.

**1937** - The installation of a 3.5-5 Kw medium wave transmitter by a Ceylonese engineer.

**1939** - The issue of a fortnightly Programme Supplement to subscriber licence

holders.

**1940** - The appointment of a Special Commission with Sir Kandiah Vaithianathan, as chairman, to report on all aspects of broadcasting. The number of licences in Ceylon reached 10,000.

**1942** - Owing to war conditions, the premises at Torrington Square were vacated for occupation by the R.A.F ., and the broadcasting organisation was accommodated in a residential bungalow in Cotta Road, Borella.

*During World War II the radio station operations were taken over by the allied forces who operated Radio SEAC from Colombo. The station was handed over to the Government of Ceylon after World War II.*

### **Wartime Radio in Ceylon**

Lord Louis Mountbatten moved the RADIO SEAC operations from New Delhi first to Kandy and then to Colombo during World War II. This was Ceylon's first ever wartime radio station and it played a vital role from 1944 - 1946.

Radio SEAC played a vital role during World War II broadcasting for 18-20 hours on the 19 meter band at 15.120 mhz. A powerful shortwave transmitter was set up in Ekala, the announcers operated from the studios in Colombo.

Radio programs and important announcements including the speeches of Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Lord Louis Mountbatten were beamed from Ceylon right across India, Burma, Malaya, Singapore. It went a long way in boosting morale of the troops stationed in these countries. David Jacobs and Desmond Carrington (who later fronted programs on BBC Radio 2 in London) were the popular English announcers of Radio SEAC operating from Ceylon - they introduced request programs and programs for loved ones back in the United Kingdom. The songs of Bing Crosby were very popular with the forces at the time - they sent in so many requests to Radio SEAC.

Read about the history of war time radio on the island of Ceylon on AWR's Wavescan radio program. The program host is David Barasoain.

Click on the picture below - to go to the AWR page and read the Wavescan script.



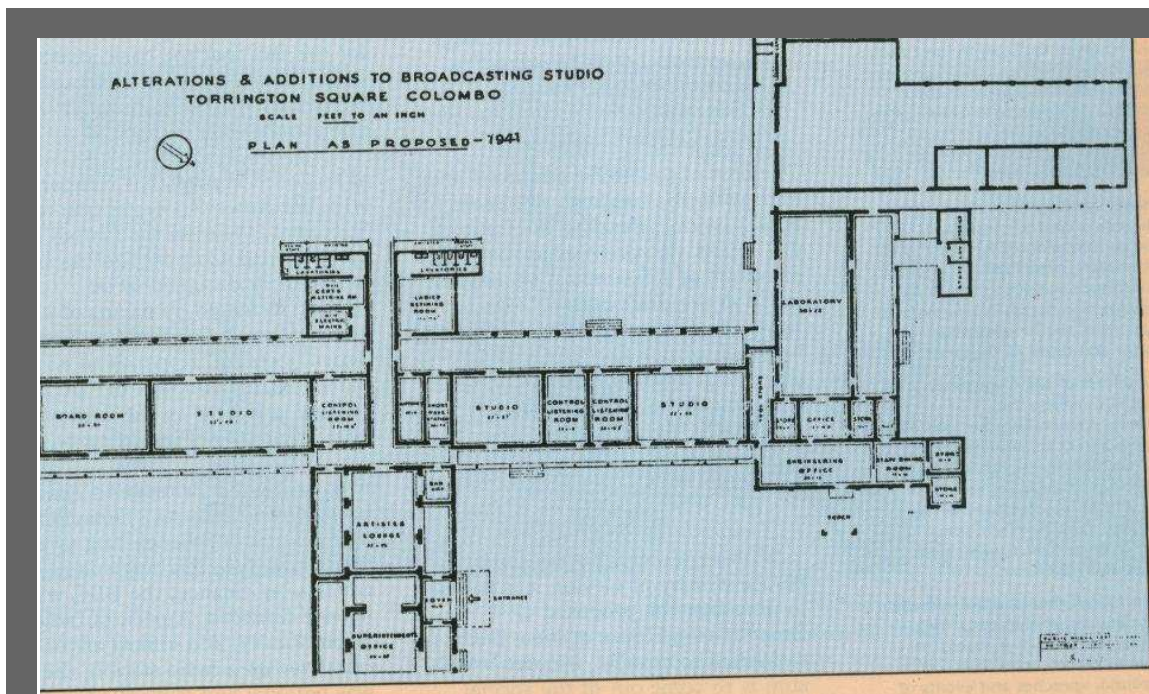
David Barasoain, presenter of the Wavescan program on AWR

**Lord Louis Mountbatten  
in Koggala**



The Marconi 100 KiloWatt Transmitter at Ekala was installed during the time of Radio SEAC. It was the second of two transmitters that were shipped to Ceylon during the war. The first shipment was sunk by a German torpedo off the coast and now lies beneath the Indian ocean. Radio SEAC ( South east asia command) continued till 1949 when it was taken over by Radio Ceylon. The number of licenses had reached 27,000.

**1947** - Work commenced on a building in Torrington Square, designed to suit the needs of a modern broadcasting station. This work was completed in September, 1949 With a studio complex of ten studios including an auditorium and three production studios and three Continuity studios for English, Sinhala and Tamil built by the renowned British architect Wynn Jones. All ten studios were equipped with Marconi consoles which really stood the test of time till the 1990's. The testimony that the acoustics of these studios are to this day within acceptable limits shows the high standard of engineering of that era.



Plan for a studio complex at Torrington Square

Mr. Fletcher was the first chief Engineer of Radio Ceylon and he was succeeded by Mr. N.S.Wickramasinghe in 1954

The first Director General of Radio Ceylon was Mr. John Lampson and he was succeeded by Mr.M.J.Perera of the Ceylon Civil Service as the first Ceylonese Director General in 1954

The Engineers and Technical officers of Radio Ceylon comprised mostly those of Radio SEAC seconded for service at Radio Ceylon. To name a few: Mr.R.E.H.Perera, Mr.L.E.Tillekeratna,Mr.Freddie Gomez,Mr. Noel Goonesekera, Mr.A.F.M.Perera, Mr.K.M.C.Jayawardana,Mr.Tudor Perera,Mr.Gerald Holsinger, Mr.Block, and Mr.C.deSilva.

The Medium wave transmission of Radio Ceylon was from the telecommunication facility at Welikade on using a 10Kw transmitters. This was replaced by the medium wave transmitting station at Diyagama in the 1960's

The short wave transmission to the provinces was from Ekala transmitting station using 25Kw. Transmitters for each language and was heard throughout Sri Lanka till the advent of FM broadcasting in the late 1970's which to a great extent replaced SW and MW broadcasting for convenience and quality.

**1950** - Inauguration of the Commercial Service of Radio Ceylon in September. Commercial broadcasting from Radio Ceylon was inaugurated on September 30, 1950 and Clifford Dodd was seconded for service via the Colombo Plan. Dodd was charismatic and innovative and there was a real 'buzz' in Radio Ceylon after his arrival. South Asian leaders and ministers of the British Commonwealth, including India's Jawaharlal Nehru, Ceylon's J.R. Jayawardene and Ghulam Mohammed, decided that Asia needed something like the Marshall Plan that had just helped rebuild Europe after the ravages of war.

The Colombo Plan, which resulted from these deliberations, was the first multilateral effort in foreign aid in Asia. The key donor countries were Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Britain and the United States, and the organisation included Asian members of the Commonwealth like India, Ceylon and Pakistan.

Australia sent Clifford.R.Dodd to Radio Ceylon under the 'Plan' and it was a 'ground breaking' experience, as far as broadcasting in Ceylon was concerned. Clifford R.Dodd is regarded as the father of commercial broadcasting.

A few more important events in the history of broadcasting in Sri Lanka:

**1953** - Appointment of a Commission on Broadcasting under the Chairmanship of Mr.N.E.WeerasuriyaQC.

**1954** - Completion of work on a separate two storeyed building for the Commercial Service work commenced in 1953.

**1955**- Commencement of the VOA receiving and transmitting station at Seeduwa.

**1958** - Installation of a Medium Wave Station at Diyagama commenced.

**1959**- Installation at Torrington square of six AWA, FM transmitters each having a output power of 100 watts as a pilot FM (mono) project for the city of Colombo, and as a programme feed to Ekala and Diyagama transmitting stations replacing the underground cable.

**1960** - Experimental Project in establishing a Regional Station in Kandy commenced at Hantane ,Senkadagala.Later it broadcast programmes on Mw to Kandy district.

**1964-** A Training school for Technical and Programme staff was established at Torrington square premises with aid given by the British Council. Mr. John Hunt was in charge of the technical section and Mr. Stuart Wavell in charge of the programme Section.

**1965-** A VHF relay station was established at Uda Radella by Mr. David Buell who was Engineer Transmitters. Programmes were received from Colombo on VHF.

**1967 -** Radio Ceylon became a public corporation on January 5th 1967. The Prime Minister of Ceylon Dudley Senanayake ceremonially opened the newly established Ceylon Broadcasting Corporation. The name "Radio Ceylon" was changed forever. Read the SLBC article below on the inauguration of the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation:

### *Ceylon Broadcasting Corporation*

***Radio Ceylon became a public corporation on 30th September 1967 and the station's name was changed to the Ceylon Broadcasting Corporation. Prime Minister Dudley Senanayake appointed a distinguished Ceylonese civil servant, Neville Jayaweera to head the CBC.***

***When Sri Lanka became a republic in 1972 the station underwent yet another name change as the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation (SLBC).***

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## TRANSFORMATION FROM RADIO CEYLON TO S.L.B.C. - 1967

The change of name from Radio Ceylon to Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation took place on January 5th, 1967 at the auspicious time of 7.18 a.m. and the plaque which is still intact was unveiled by the then Prime Minister, the late Hon. Dudley Senanayaka in the presence of Hon. R. Premadasa, then Minister of Local Government & Deputy Minister of Information and Broadcasting.

President Premadasa's address on that historic occasion which was broadcast that day on the newborn SLBC, is reproduced, not only because it is timely, but more so, because the SLBC has taken tremendous strides in widening the scope and content of its home and foreign services, during his near three-year tenure of office as Executive President.

This is the text of his broadcast - Editor.

"A few moments ago, you witnessed the inauguration of the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation or rather, the transformation of a Government-managed Radio Ceylon into a State Corporation, by the Prime Minister, Hon. Dudley Senanayake. The decision for this change of name and status was taken by the Government in pursuance of a recommendation made by a Commission, headed by Mr. H.A.J. Hulugalle. When this Department came within the purview of the Minister of State, Hon. J.R. Jayewardene, he presented a Bill in Parliament and got it passed. And so we have this name-change today.

As a result, it was decided to place the new Corporation under the control of the Hon. Prime Minister and to have two separate units - namely the Department of Information & the Broadcasting Corporation.

It only proves the importance that the Government attaches to Information and Broadcasting as two separate entities. Radio Ceylon was hence transformed into Corporation status because the Government is concerned that these two entities should get more closer to the people.

On this day, when this Corporation starts functioning under a Chairman and a Board of Directors, they will have the freedom to function independently and formulate plans to widen the scope and content of the broadcasting function. The Venerable Rajakeeya Panditha Kalukondhayawe Pagnasekera Mahanayake Thera, who administered Pansil, has confirmed today that ours is a step in the right direction.

You will admit that under a democratic society, radio has to play a vital role in keeping the masses educated and informed. Radio should not only air the views on the

**What President  
Premadasa said that  
Day-Stands True  
Today**

policies of the Government in power, but also assess the views and opinions of the people and make them known to the Government.

The Radio should be an instrument through which people are taught spiritual and moral values and create in them a sense of unity and common understanding of issues and problems. I have not the slightest doubt that this new Corporation will from today evolve necessary measures to bring about a spiritual uplift among our people and not only concentrate on the development efforts. This is our nation. We have unlimited natural resources which we have to tap in our bid to free ourselves from the fetters of foreign powers on whom we have got used to place our dependence for our basic needs-our basic commodities.



Inauguration day of the S.L.B.C.  
The then Prime Minister, Honourable Dudley Senanayake with President Premadasa

**1967-** Miss. Sumithra Senanayaka joined S.L.B.C. as an Engineer. She was the first lady Engineer to join S.L.B.C.

**1969-** Miss. Senanayaka was appointed as Engineer Training and left S.L.B.C. in 1972

**1968** -Under phase one of a West German aid programme, Regional Transmitting stations on Medium wave were set up at Weeraketiya , Maho, Ambewela, Kantale and Mandathivu. to enable a broader segment of the population to receive clear reception.

**1969**-Phase two and three of the above project covered Ampara,Mahiyangana, Ratnapura and Kandy.

**1969**- FM transmitting station constructed at Ensalwatte ,Deniyaya under the West German aid programme and made operational to feed Weeraketiya MW transmitting station. Programmes received from Colombo via Uda Radella.

Transmitters broadcasting programmes in English, Sinhala and Tamil languages and were heard throughout Sri Lanka till the advent island wide FM broadcasting in the late 1970's which to a great extent replaced MW broadcasting for convenience and quality. The programme feed to these regional transmitters was very conveniently relayed from the UDA Radella transmitting facility. It also became a linking and relay point for outside broadcasts from various parts of the country.

**1970** - Mr.N.S Wickramasinhe retired as chief engineer and Mr. David Buell was appointed Deputy Director General Engineering.

**1971**- Mr. Lal Herath who was from the OTS , joined SLBC and was appointed Superintending Engineer Transmitters, while Mr.R.E.H.Perera was appointed Superintending Engineer Studios.

**1975**- An experimental FM Stereo broadcast to cover the Colombo district in addition to the pilot project for the city was initiated by Mr. David Buell from the VHF room in Colombo. Fm receivers were few at that time but nevertheless reception reports received were many. On the basis of these reports two 1Kw transmitters were installed at Colombo and Radella to provide a FM service to Colombo and the Central province as a pilot project.

A Micro wave transmission to relay programmes to the Ekala SW station and Diyagama MW station was inaugurated in preparation for the non aligned conference that was to follow.

**1975**- A regional MW station called Rajarata Sevaya was inaugurated receiving its programmes via Uda Radella. Later it was upgraded to a full fledged FM broadcast station with studios in the 1980's.

**1978** - A feasibility survey was initiated by the government and the Japanese government, through SLBC to study the possibility of introducing an all island TV project. The study was a success and the Japanese government offered Sri Lanka a National TV station. Mr.David Buell (DDGE) was in charge.

**1979**- while on a FS survey at Pidurutalagala Mr Buell fell ill and passed away.As Mr. Lal Herath S.E. was on no pay leave on an assignment in the UAE, Mr.Rukmin Wijemanne was appointed as DDGE to fill the void created by the demise of Mr. Buell.

**1981**- Ruhunu Sevaya of SLBC inaugurated at Matara.

**1981**- Mr.Rukmin Wijemanne moved over to the National TV and Mr. Palman was appointed DDGE.

**1983**- A Mahaweli Community Radio with the auspices of the Danish Government was inaugurated at Girundarakotte, Mahailupalama and later at Kotmale to educate the farmers on modern cultivation methods to obtain higher yields. The head office was in Kandy.



**1983-** A Regional station “Mahanuwara Sevaya” complete with studios was established in Kandy.

**1983-** Also saw the foundation being laid for another FM station to cover the North Central Province and the Eastern Province at Karagahatenne in the Matale district.

**1984-** Mr.Lionel Pinto was appointed as DDGE

**1986-** Karagahatenne FM Transmitting station made operational using 1KW transmitters.

**1990-** A 2Kw. FM transmitter and a studio was established within the precincts of the army camp at Palaly to provide music and news to the residents of Jaffna and to the service personal in the peninsula. Messer’s Upali Jayasinhe and Tilak Ranasinghe assisted by Manikdiwela and Bamunusinghe pioneered this project.

**1992-** Under a grant from the Japanese government plans were drawn to establish a new studio complex, Auditorium and Control room in the SLBC premises. It was also proposed to install new FM STEREO transmitters to cover the Colombo District and reequip the Outside Broadcast section and provide an OB transmission bus.

**1992 -** Miss. Arundathi Wimalasooriya was appointed as DE Studios.

**1992-** Mr. LAL Herath appointed as Addl. DDGE.

**1992-** A pilot project was launched at Hunnasgiriya to provide FM coverage to Kandy.

**1993-** The new studio complex and FM transmitters under the grant from the government of Japan was declared open by President D.B.Wijetunge.

**1993-** New studio complex for Ruhunu sevaya was declared open by the Chairman of SLBC Mr.Kumar Abeysinghe.

**1994-** A new FM transmitting station to cover the southern province and the NCP was established and inaugurated by the Minister of Broadcasting and information Mr. Tyrone Fernando.

**1997-** A FM transmission station to partly cover the South and the entire Colombo district was established at Yatiyantota.

**1997-** The FM station at Hunnasgiriya was made operational with seven transmitters.

**1998 -** Miss. Wimalasooriya was appointed as D.D.G. (E) and left S.L.B.C. in 2000.

**2002-** A Digital Micro wave project was initiated to replace the existing VHF programme feed. The base station was at Yatiyantota linking Karagahatenne, Hunnasgiriya, Nayabedde thru Kikiliyamana. The programme feed was fed from Colombo to Yatiyantota base station. The equipment was provided by Moseley Electronics, USA.

**2005-** December 5th Sri Lanka celebrated eighty years in broadcasting, a historic landmark in the world of broadcasting.

**2007-** January 5<sup>th</sup> Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation celebrated forty years as a public broadcasting corporation.

**2008-** SLBC archives library computerized.

**2009-** Digital FM Stereo transmitters installed to cover Colombo.

*from personal knowledge , with information obtained from SLBC, Ex Engineering staff , well-wishers and from the web.*

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