

Local pay-TV content gets an Indian boost

Indian media and entertainment company Zee Entertainment Enterprises has just set up shop in Indonesia, and the man behind it is urging customers to stay tuned for more.

By **Muhamad Al Azhari**



Indonesia country head Maria Liza Ginting, MD and CEO Punit Goenka, chairman Subhash Chandra and Asia-Pacific head Sushruta Samanta.

Cultural similarities, as well as the rising middle-income class in Indonesia, has prompted Zee Entertainment Enterprises, one of India's leading media and entertainment companies, to set up an arm of its pay-television business in Indonesia.

"We have very strong cultural similarities," said Subhash Chandra, chairman and founder of the Essel Group, which owns Zee. "These similarities originated way back,

thousands of years ago, during the reign of the Majapahit Empire, one of the greatest and most powerful empires in the history of Indonesia and Southeast Asia, which was based in Java. Till today, the similarities in music, dance and customs are very apparent," he added.

Zee marked its entry into the Indonesian market recently with the opening of an office in Jakarta and the appointment of Maria Liza Ginting as Indonesia country head.

From India to Indonesia

Through his company's Indonesian outpost, the Indian media-tycoon will offer the Zee Bioskop channel, which focuses on Bollywood blockbuster movies dubbed in Bahasa Indonesia, and Veria Living, a lifestyle channel.

Chandra has already sealed several deals with local companies to enable Indonesians who love watching Indian movies and programs to enjoy the content at home.

Zee Bioskop is currently available through two local satellite pay-television providers, Aora TV and Orange TV. Zee Bioskop is also one of the frontline channels at Kompas Vision, another pay-TV outfit controlled by the Kompas Gramedia Group. Meanwhile Orange TV plans to launch Veria Living in the near future.

"Indonesia is economically one of the fastest-growing markets with a huge potential for pay-TV growth," Chandra said. "I'm confident that these launches will flag off a new beginning for the venture and relationship between the two countries," Chandra said.

"With Zee Bioskop, our endeavor is to bring further synergies between our entertainment offerings and local tastes," he added. The movies shown on Zee Bioskop cover every genre including action, comedy, drama and romance.

Zee is currently exploring the launch of a third channel "once our feasibility study is complete," Chandra said, adding that he sees Indonesia as one of the most promising economies in the Asian region, with a population that is relatively "young and vibrant."

"We endeavor to be part of their lives in terms of lifestyle and

PHOTO: MOH/DEFIZAL

entertainment. We will continue to address the needs of the market in terms of entertainment and opening a representative office is a step towards this commitment. We will also increase our investments and team strength," he said.

When asked about whether Zee plans to expand its cooperation with other cable television providers including First Media, Chandra said: "Indeed, we are open to offering our channels to all pay-TV platforms in Indonesia including cable television providers like First Media."

First Media is a subsidiary of the Lippo Group, which also owns BeritaSatu Media Holdings, of which *GlobeAsia* is a part.

Subhash launched India's first satellite television channel Zee TV in 1992 and over more than two decades has managed to build strong recognition for the Zee brand at home and abroad.

Zee, which offers 34 domestic channels and 32 dedicated international channels, aims to reach 1 billion viewers and be ranked in the top three global media brands by 2020.

India's Bollywood movies are known all over the world for their massive production volumes, and have attracted a niche following from regions influenced by Indian culture.

The Indian film industry produces more than 800 movies a year – twice as many as Hollywood. With dramatic storylines, attractive outfits, singing and dancing, it draws millions of viewers not only in India, but across the world.

Members of the Bollywood Mania Club Indonesia (BMCI), who attended the launch, were ecstatic. "Zee Bioskop will be the perfect platform for Bollywood fans in Indonesia," said Sarifuddin Syarif, a member.

The 30-year-old from Bogor said he usually watches Bollywood movies in cinemas and on a local TV channel that screens Hindi movies. "But (the local channel) only screens the movies on weekends," Sarifuddin said. "And they're usually old re-runs that we've seen so many times. But now, new

movies are available 24 hours every day (on Zee Bioskop)."

Another BMCI member, Asih Kiran, also welcomes the new channel. "It's about time that we had something like this," said Asih. "And the movies will be even more enjoyable to watch, with all dialogue dubbed into Indonesian. We'll love them even more."

Zee and Essel Group

Zee is controlled by the Essel Group, a \$3.5 billion business conglomerate with a diversified business presence across the media, entertainment, packaging, infrastructure, education, precious metals and technology sectors.

Chandra's business empire started in 1976 as a commodity trading and export firm. Today, the group has a workforce of over 8,000 employees via its worldwide operations.

Meanwhile, Zee has garnered a following of millions since its launch in 1992 and. Chandra shared the story of its founding with *GlobeAsia* via e-mail. "More than two decades back, I wondered why India did not have a private satellite channel of its own. The answers to this question were the numerous legal constraints.

"I remember the then-Secretary for Information and Broadcasting dissuading my intentions with statements like, 'You will introduce consumerism and destroy the country. Your proposal can fructify only over my dead body.'

"Since taking 'no' as an answer was never an option, I continued my pursuit and entered into this business by setting up operations in Hong Kong. This led to the birth of Zee and to an entire new industry in India. In my opinion, this was the most defining moment for me."

Chandra's hard work has paid dividends. Zee is now the largest producer and aggregator of Hindi programming in the world. It has an extensive library housing over 120,000 hours of television content, rights to more than 3,500 movie titles from leading studios and with iconic film stars, as well as over 700 million



"Zee Bioskop will be the perfect platform for Bollywood fans in Indonesia."

Sarifuddin Syarif

viewers across 169 countries.

In the midst of its achievements, Chandra said the group has pledged a commitment to consistency and innovation to ensure it offers competitive products. "A key essence of a true leader in today's era is to constantly innovate, in order to stay relevant to the audiences and to stay ahead in the competitive atmosphere," he said. "At Zee, innovation has always been the core pillar and a key component of our foundation. The many industry firsts which Zee holds to its credit are a result of our constant thirst to innovate." ©

Additional reporting by Sylviana Hamdani