

HELLO, HELLO, HERE'S 88 TO YOU!



Mr Joseph Seah (extreme left) with Father Marshall Moran from Nepal, Mr Arther Godfrey from New Zealand and Mr and Mrs Al Dougherty of Singapore watch as Mr Peter Carbutt and Mr Frank Aw, both of Singapore, test the station's equipment

PS: That means love and kisses to you, and that's why 88 is a favourite number with radio hams

KING Hussein of Jordan is one, and so are King Juan Carlos of Spain and Senator Barry Goldwater of the US.

They are among the one million-strong global fraternity of radio hams who enjoy the thrill of making new friends over the airwaves.

But you do not have to be a monarch or a US senator to become a ham. All you need is a knowledge of radio and the ability to understand morse code, plus a transceiver and an aerial.

If you pass the necessary examinations and get your licence approved by the authorities, you can start sending your love and kisses - 88 - and best regards - 73 - across the airwaves.

In Singapore there are 60 radio amateurs. The number is small because high-rise living makes it difficult for enthusiasts to put up aerials.

Two Fridays ago the Singapore Amateur

more than 200 fellow enthusiasts from Asean, Brunei, Australia, Japan, India, New Zealand, the United States and Hong Kong.

During the 13th South East Asian Net Conference (SEANET '83) which ends at the Equatorial Hotel today, the hams will be able to exchange greetings with countries all over the world using an amateur radio station with the special call sign 9VO-SEA.

Mr Joseph Seah, President of the Singapore Amateur Radio Transmitting Society, who has been a ham for more than 20 years, said: "We are in the unique position of being able to enhance international relations and promote goodwill as well as being there to help in times of disaster."

During the Alaskan earthquake, he said, it was a radio amateur who managed to make contact with the world outside and ask for assistance.

remote part of South America, it was a radio ham who called for medical aid.

In another incident, it was a Singaporean ham who picked up the distress signal. The engine had failed on an American yacht in the Indian Ocean.

As far as Mr Seah is aware, there are only three countries that do not permit hamming. They are Burma, Albania and Vietnam.

Most countries, he said, recognised the part it could play in leading to mutual understanding.

Mr Seah, who was SBC's Controller of Services, estimates that a transceiver - a combined receiver and transmitter - costs about \$2,000.

"Today, such equipment is so well constructed that it lasts for years. I have had mine for eight or nine years."

Two factors affect the range of Singapore hams. They are time differences and

For instance, in winter, it is more difficult to call up Britain.

And a regular broadcasting station has much more power than an amateur radio station, Mr Seah pointed out.

"We are limited to less than 10 per cent of its power."

Mr Seah said hamming started in Singapore after the war.

"People here were keen to catch up with what had been going on in the rest of the world. During the war, we were not allowed to listen to anything except the local station. There was a keen desire to make up for lost time."

"I started playing around with radio receivers and stumbled across these people using strange jargon and wondered who they were."

Using a portable radio in a friend's car, he managed to track down a local ham who

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Using a portable radio in a friend's car, he managed to track down a local ham who explained what was going on.

ALL STORIES BY JUDY WALKER

Priest is Nepal's only radio ham



Father Moran

THERE is only one radio ham in Nepal. His call sign is 9N1MM.

It belongs to a sprightly 76-year-old Roman Catholic priest, the only resident in Nepal to have been granted a licence to operate an amateur radio station there.

Father Marshall Moran, who runs a boys' school in Katmandu and helped to set up a girls' school there, joked that the authorities trusted him with their children and therefore they trusted him with a transmitter. He was granted a licence in 1960.

With a warm personality, it is not surprising to learn that this man will go down in history. In 1951 he became the first Catholic priest to enter Nepal, which had been a closed community for 200 years.

The King of Nepal's three sisters, he proudly tells you, have all married old boys from his school and the Queen and her sisters went to the girls' school he helped to found.

Father Moran used his radio to keep the Royal Family in touch with the Crown Prince, now the King, when he was a student at Eton in England.

And when Nehru died in 1964, he used it to contact King Mahendra, the present King's father, who was visiting the Berlin Wall.

Father Moran said: "When the King heard the news he was able to cancel a tour of France and get to India in time for the funeral."

Father Moran, who spends an hour in the morning and an hour in the evening at his transmitter every day, was born in Chicago in 1906. After graduating from St Louis University in Missouri, he went to India and set up a boys' high school in Patna.

The school, which is still thriving, was so successful that two more were set up in Delhi and Jaipur.

The Royal Family of Nepal sent their children to Father Moran's schools in India and in 1951 invited him to establish a school in Nepal.

Hamming started in S'pore in the Forties

HAMMING has been going on in Singapore since the end of World War Two. It was in the Sixties that radio amateurs in the region set up a network.

The desire to have contact with each other was a natural development and in 1971 the first meeting was held in a Penang hotel.

Thirty hams attended the meeting, which was to become an annual event, held in Asean countries in rotation.

The current meeting is the third in Singapore. Other meetings here were in 1973 and 1978.

Over the years, radio hams from outside the immediate region have been attracted to the annual convention and this current meeting is being attended by delegates from Australia, New Zealand, Japan and the United States as well as from Asean.

What do they chat about?

Most people, according to Mr Seah, believe radio hams just exchange pleasantries.

"But we also talk about new modes of transmission and antennae and convey emergency signals to the right people."

By international agreement hams operate on Shortwave and High Frequency bands and communicate with each other in different ways, including morse code; the voice - English is the international language of radio hams with even Russian hams communicating in English - and radioteletype.

And they can use Oscar - the Orbiting Satellite Carrying Amateur Radio - which passes this region at certain times.

If you are in their conversation,

much of it would not make sense to you. For radio hams have a language all their own.

No one, Mr Seah said, was quite sure how it developed.

When they talk about money they refer to cabbages, and if someone has had too much to drink he has "too much radio frequency."

Children are "harmonics".

Hams also use what is known as the Q code, a kind of spoken shorthand adapted from morse code.

Mr Seah said: "When you try to make contact, you go up and down the band picking up other hams making the general CQ call. You may hear five or six CQ calls, but you pick the one with the strongest signal."

"After stating where you live, your name and your equipment you can talk about anything."

There is even a certificate for "chewing the rag" given to hams who spend more than an hour chatting to an air-wave friend.

The most-prized award is the DXCC hunters award, given to those who can prove they have made contact with hams in 100 countries. Cards sent from the hams they have contacted help them to back up their claims.

Mr Seah has more than 20,000 such cards and holds the WAC - worked all continents - award.

One of the hams he contacted was the late King Namgyal of Sikkim. Other Singaporean hams have cards to prove they have spoken to King Hussein of Jordan.

Common love runs in this family

HS1YL is the call sign of Madam Mayuree from Thailand. Madam Mayuree is attending the convention with two of her children, Sadudee, 15, and Jakawal Chotikul, 13.

Both Sadudee and her brother have been hamming for five years and attended the 1978 convention in Singapore.

Their mother, who transmits on VHF, has been a ham for 17 years and has many friends throughout the world.

One of them is ZL1HV, otherwise known as Mr Arthur Godfrey, 70, the immediate past president of the New Zealand Association of Radio Transmitters and a director of the International Amateur Radio Union, Region Three.

Mr Godfrey emigrated to New Zealand after 31 years' service with the signals branch of the RAF. It was while serving with the RAF that he first became interested in amateur radio transmission.

"In the RAF outside of working hours, we would call up other RAF bases in places like Baghdad, Delhi and Singapore."

Mr Godfrey, who taught radio and electronics at a technical institute in New Zealand for 17 years, said he got his biggest thrill when he contacted someone long distance using the least power.

"It really is a thrill to get in touch with someone a long way off when you are using so little power - normally just sufficient to light a torch bulb. Using even less one tenth of a watt I managed to talk to someone in Alaska."

The New Zealand association has 4,000 members and 80 branches. Many of the branches have emergency corps, who help out in times of accidents and disasters.

"Such corps are located all over the country and are lifted by helicopter to the top of hills when necessary. They have been completely integrated into the search and rescue system and also provide lines of communication for the Civil Defence."



Madam Mayuree