

# \$100-a-month offer on cable subscriptions

By TIM METCALFE

**HEAVYWEIGHT** consortium Hutchison Cable-Vision yesterday staked a claim to pioneer cable TV in Hongkong with the offer of \$100-a-month subscriptions to households.

The cable consortium — with \$2.5 billion worth of backing — pledged a service in the price range of most families.

HCV is the first of eight companies contesting the cable race to formally announce its proposed charge.

General manager Mr Melvyn Sears said yesterday he expected half of the territory's 1.5 million urban homes to switch on to cable TV by the end of next year.

He said he was confident of defeating rivals in the franchise war which is currently being evaluated by Government consultants before the cable licence is granted towards the end of this year.

"Our package will be affordable by the vast majority of families," he said.

"We envisage it being taken by 750,000 households."

Mr Sears was reluctant to reveal in detail the cable consortium's program proposals, explaining: "There's vigorous competition for the franchise. We don't want to give away our plans."



Mr Sears

But he claimed "substantial support" from major overseas program and film distributors.

Program planning executive Mr Peter Lam Yuk-wah said: "We have confirmation of program supplies from major overseas distributors which we can activate once HCV is awarded the licence."

Among these suppliers waiting in the wings, he said, were Columbia, Warner, Paramount, MCA, Viacom, MGM/UA/Turner, and 20th Century Fox (US); Fuji 8, NTV and TBS (Japan); with Channel Four, Granada, Thames and BT Vision in Britain.

However, HCV pledges that 80 per cent of programs will be aimed directly at the local Cantonese community.

Broadcasting veteran Yvonne Sun Siu, who is steering the HCV bid, said: "In this unique Hongkong market, HCV has to develop as a hybrid providing both broad-appeal programs and special interest programs to the segmentalised audience."

Community news, she said, would be at the forefront of HCV's strategy.

HCV promised to stimulate Hongkong's television production industry by commissioning a lion's share of the output from independent producers.

But the consortium — backed by Hutchison, Cavendish, Shaw Brothers and Commercial Radio — is understandably cagey when it comes to naming names.

Asked about presenters in line to front the new network, Mr Sears said: "That's something we're keeping to ourselves. We're drawing a short-list of those who will be available to join us."

However, two widely-experienced broadcasters are confirmed on the HCV team: producer Kam Kwok-leung, who has 250 hours of TV programs with three films to his credit, and respected current affairs analyst Hui Kam-fung who has hosted such news programs as *Newsline*, *Today in Legco* and *The Future of Hongkong*.