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Bell Express Vu to add 76 Channels to Lineup

By Keith Damsell, Media Reporter

Bell ExpressVu LP plans to add 76 new channels to its direct-to-home satellite TV service, an increased lineup that failed to impress the company's cable TV competitors.

"We're launching a whole new world of entertainment to our customers," Tim McGee, president of the BCE Inc. unit, told a Toronto press conference yesterday.

The new channels, expected to be offered to customers later this year, increase the company's total channel count to about 376. The new services are varied, including 25 French- and English-language local channels, 34 specialty digital services, six third-language services and 11 additional high-definition TV channels. The new channels are owned by a who's who of broadcasters, including **CHUM Ltd.** of Toronto and **Craig Broadcast Systems Inc.** of Calgary.

The services will be available across the country to Bell ExpressVu's more than 1.3 million customers.

Multicultural broadcasters struggling to get distribution of their services were enthusiastic yesterday.

"It's very exciting for us. We feel like kids before Christmas," said **Shan Chandrasekar**, president and chief executive officer of **Asian Television Network International Ltd.** of Newmarket, Ont.

The potential audience for the bulk of ATN's digital services has been limited to **Rogers Communication Inc.'s** cable TV network. Bell ExpressVu is adding three ATN non-English language channels to its lineup: a Tamil-language channel, a Punjabi-language channel and lastly, B4U, a service featuring "Bollywood" movies made in India.

The cable TV industry was critical of Bell ExpressVu's boosted lineup. "A lot of the services they are adding we've had for a long time," said **Michael Allen**, vice-president of programming at Roger's Cable. "They're obviously trying to catch up with where we have been for a year and a half."

The Toronto-based company has about 2.3 million basic cable TV customers with about 450,000 subscribing to digital TV services