

# Idiom by Lon Yan

## 奄奄一息

yan3 yan3 yi4 xi1

It's official – digital radio services will disappear in Hong Kong within a few months. The executive council has decided to terminate RTHK's digital audio broadcasting service – the only one remaining in the territory – saying it was no longer practical to carry on.

When DAB – digital audio broadcasting – was first introduced in the territory, it was touted as “a robust form of broadcasting” that can deliver not only voice, but also text, picture and data.

The technology might be attractive, but actual operation was not. The three licenses granted to commercial entities in 2011 were soon given up. Since then, RTHK became the only local DAB operator.

A few years have passed since, and the government had to admit that this kind of

service is hard to run, and that few were interested to listen. The present state of local digital radio broadcast was described by the Chinese media as “奄奄一息” (*yan3 yan3 yi4 xi1*).

“奄奄” (*yan3 yan3*) is “feeble breathing,” “一” (*yi4*) is “one,” “息” (*xi1*) “breath,” “to cease” and “一息” (*yi4 xi1*) means “one breath left.” Literally, “奄奄一息” (*yan3 yan3 yi4 xi1*) is “feeble breathing with only one breath left.”

The idiom means “at one's last gasp,” “on one's deathbed,” “on the point of dying,” “on the verge of death,” “within an inch of life,” “at the gate of death,” “moribund.”

“奄奄一息” (*yan3 yan3 yi4 xi1*) can be used to describe someone who is bleeding to death, or a company that has been bleeding so much money that is on the verge of closure.

### Terms containing the character “息” (*xi1*) include:

休息 (*xiu1 xi1*) – to rest; to take a break

小息 (*xiao3 xi1*) – a recess; a short break

息怒 (*xi1 nu4*) – to cease to be angry

利息 (*li4 xi1*) – interest