

to the scene, the content we broadcast was all been about the government. Currently we highlight the needs of all classes; that is what makes us popular.

Q: How has the way of reporting changed since the new government took over?

Before the new government came on to the scene, Radio Nepal was controlled by the old regime. They decided the programmes and contents to be aired, news in particular. Now, our chief in the News Division decides content that means well for the citizens. We provide news for all walks of life. The government is not controlling what is being aired. If we remain silent on a certain piece of news, other private channels will win the competition, though I am not saying these channels are practising balanced reporting. Sometimes they have created havoc within society because they failed to be fair in reporting news.

Radio Nepal is a responsible, creative media. We deliver news after it has been double-checked. Since the election, we have stretched the boundary in freedom of reporting.

Q: What drives Radio Nepal's determination to go into public broadcasting?

When Radio Nepal was under the government, we were deemed a pro-government channel. We lost our credibility as such. But now, the 'new Nepal' needs a new Radio Nepal. We are the voice of the voiceless. We want to regain that credibility as a people's radio station, but commercial radio's interest lies elsewhere.

Radio Nepal should not look after the interest of any sector, group, religious party or political party. It should be for all.

Q: What measures are you taking to transform Radio Nepal into the people's radio station? And what

are the chances that the proposal is approved?

We are in the midst of exploring the possibility of Radio Nepal becoming a public service broadcaster. From my rich experience of sharing knowledge with many international broadcasters, I know that going public is the only path Radio Nepal has to follow. We have to be a radio station that is trustworthy, accurate and independent.

Currently the government's first task is to draft a new constitution, which is expected to be completed in 17 months. Meanwhile I am urging them to approve our proposal. The approval takes minimal time; rather it is more a matter of realisation on their part, the importance for Radio Nepal to go public.

When that happens, the transition itself will take around two years due to the formalities and procedures it entails. The government has to justify the investment spent before a full transition can take place.

Becoming a public broadcaster is a 'must'. If they (the new government) do not approve Radio Nepal's transition proposal, then what is the difference between the kingdom and the new democratic republic?

Furthermore, when the proposal approves, many international organisations will agree with the Nepalese government that we are on the right track and further cooperation will follow.

Q: What will be the main directions if Radio Nepal goes public?

We will launch an array of new programmes to cater to the needs of the people, such as educational programmes, distance learning programmes, etc.

For example, recently we aired a live programme called 'Legislator with

People' before the Constituent Assembly election took place. This allowed people in the hilly and remote areas to call in and ask questions about the election. Politicians were bound to answer questions raised by the people, live. This is another feature that has strengthened Radio Nepal's status.

Q: What other new programmes are being aired that are different from the pre-election period?

There are so many. One example is a programme called *Abakapusta*. It means 'The New Generation'. It tells a success story of a lady, and how she turned herself into a millionaire from having as little as US\$3.

Nepal is a beautiful country with so much resources and potential to grow. But people, especially the younger generation, are discouraged by its economic situation.

The country should be led by the youth, but there are hardly any programmes focusing on youth at the moment. That is why it is important for Radio Nepal to inject that positivism into them.

On top of that, programmes such as Children's News, news directed by the children, women's programmes, programmes for the disabled as well as programmes to educate on HIV/AIDS control are some of the new programmes we have to offer.

Q: How do you see Radio Nepal five years from now?

We will be broadcasting 24 hours via all our media channels throughout the country, as well as on the Internet, and hopefully, will have launched a new national channel.

It is my dream for Radio Nepal to own an educational and an entertainment channel respectively, broadcasting all channels throughout the country. □

Vietnam hosts first ASEAN song contest

A new annual song contest for ABU members in south-east Asian countries was launched by Radio the Voice of Vietnam (VOV) in October.

Branded the 'ASEAN Golden Melodies Festival', the first event – involving three televised concerts – was staged in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

The contest featured artists from countries in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), as well as guest performers from China and Korea, who competed in two categories – folk and pop.

VOV partnered with Ho Chi Minh City TV (HTV) to bring the three concerts live to audiences in Vietnam and across many ASEAN countries.

The event was staged to promote cultural exchanges and the diversity of traditional and contemporary music that exists around the region.

Strengthen bonds

VOV President, Vu Van Hien, said the festival would also help promote friendships and understanding between ASEAN countries.

"This is a chance for Vietnam's singers to raise their voices and learn the performance styles of foreign singers, as well as promote Vietnam's music to the world," he said

Mr Vu Van Hien said he hoped that an ABU member in another ASEAN country would be prepared to host the festival in 2009.

ABU Secretary-General, David Astley, congratulated VOV on taking the initiative to launch the song contest.

"The professionalism and artistic variations of the performances, reflecting the different cultures and music of the countries represented, made the task of the judging panel an extremely difficult one," he said.

"But at the same time these differences emphasise the rich diversity that exists in the musical heritage of the region," he added.

In a speech to the closing ceremony he told of the success that had been enjoyed by the ABU when it had organised an Asia-wide song contest for about six years back in the late 1980s.



The opening ceremony of the ASEAN Golden Melodies Festival 2008



Reynaldo Raymond Pagi of Malaysia is all smiles after winning a gold medal in the folk category

"It was probably one of the most successful activities ever undertaken by the ABU, but it finished in the early nineties because it was growing so large we couldn't find sufficient sponsors to continue to support it," he explained.

"Perhaps this event in the future can grow to become an annual song contest for all ABU members – like the event we had 20 years ago."

The first ASEAN Golden Melodies Festival involved each country sending



Silver medalists Minh Quan and Dam Vinh Hung from Vietnam (left) with gold medalist Nur Nadia Fadilla Abu Bakar from Malaysia (right)

between one and four singers to the competition to perform folk songs in their native languages and pop songs in English.

Two gold, silver and bronze medals were awarded in each category with prize money of US\$1,500 for the gold medal winners, US\$1,000 for silver and US\$500 for bronze.

Each of the medal winners also received Motorola mobile phones and a framed certificate.

During their time in Ho Chi Minh City the contestants were treated to some local tours so that they could gain an understanding of local customs and culture.

Local organisation was carried out by event management company, Cat Tien Sa, and the festival was sponsored by Vietnam's Number One Juice company. □



Left to right: Bronze medalists Dio Annisa Hapsari from Indonesia, Putri Norizah Iknor Rizah from Brunei and Nykó Macá from the Philippines

ASEAN Golden Melodies Festival 2008 winners:

Folk categories

- Gold Medals: Ms Hong Ngat (Vietnam) and Mr Reynaldo Raymond Pagi (Malaysia)
- Silver Medals: Mr Dam Vinh Hung (Vietnam) and Ms Nur Nadia Fadilla Abu Bakar (Malaysia)
- Bronze Medals: Mr Hendra Sudarmanto (Indonesia) and Ms Putri Norizah Iknor Rizah (Brunei)

Pop categories

- Gold Medals: Ms Nur Nadia Fadilla Abu Bakar (Malaysia) and Ms Ngoc Anh (Vietnam)
- Silver Medals: Mr Minh Quan (Vietnam) and Mr Dam Vinh Hung (Vietnam)
- Bronze Medals: Ms Nykó Macá (Philippines) and Ms Dio Annisa Hapsari (Indonesia)

IOC drops EBU's sports rights

*By John Barton,
ABU Director of Sport*



If family quarrels have bittered unmatched by others then the break-up of the Olympic family in Europe is going to have serious long term consequences.

By rejecting the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) for the next two Olympic Games – Sochi 2014 and as yet unnamed host city for 2016 – the International Olympic Committee (IOC) is taking a huge risk.

While the IOC might succeed in getting a better price in an open market where agencies and pay-TV operators are now bidding with a reasonable expectation of success there is no guarantee.

Broadcasting comes to little Agalega

Broadcasting has been introduced in Agalega, made up of two smaller islands in Mauritius with a population of just 350.

The initial set-up, launched in October, consists of an FM radio and a free-to-air (DVB-T) TV with three channels.

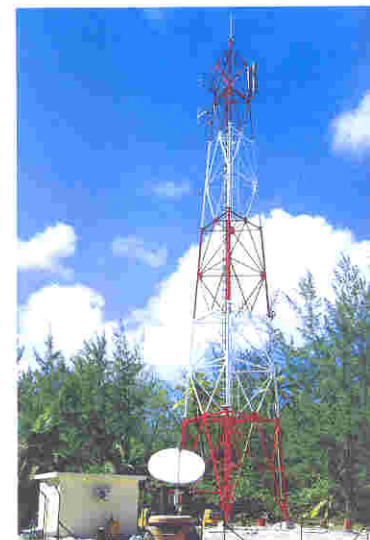
The TV and radio signals are relayed from the main island of Mauritius through Eutelsat W3A's satellite.

Because transport is scarce, broadcasting engineers faced difficulties delivering the equipment for installation.

On 28 September, the Indian Navy helped solve the transport problem, and engineers managed to install a 30 metre mast and the transmitting systems for both TV and radio.

Before these new channels came into existence, the inhabitants on the islands would gather at a community centre to watch and listen to programmes broadcast from the Mauritius Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) via a satellite receiver and a hi-fi system.

The inhabitants of the two islands, North and South, are now able to receive TV signals sent from a digital transmitter with VHF aerial and a set-top-box.



The transmission station on Agalega

Broadcasting in Agalega is commercially viable but the new service is expected to transform the lives of the people. Among other things it will enable them to stay tuned to weather forecasts – a crucial issue on islands rising a few feet above sea level.

Look no further than Asia where ESPN and Star locked horns over cricket rights for some years only to find that by competing they were playing into the hands of the property owners who fed off the frenzy that was competition.

Rupert Murdoch is not a man to linger over a bottom line that was being savaged by the high rights prices for cricket and football and so the two giants of the Asian pay industry entered into an unholy alliance – ESPN Star: keep your friends close, and your enemies even closer.

If the IOC thinks that taking out the EBU, its partner of 52 years, will enliven competition across a range of media platforms they could be in for a shock.

As the world's economy slides into the ditch, and the prospects of a recovery one or two years away, the IOC might well have been advised to have taken the EBU's money.

But wasn't to be. The IOC is holding out for a billion dollars – 50 percent more than what the EBU paid in the last contract.

Who's got that sort of money in an economic climate where all over the world governments are bailing out their banks and financial institutions with billions in loans, unemployment queues are growing daily, credit has literally dried up, millions of people have lost their homes, and the big three auto makers in the US face bankruptcy!

And if an agency or a Murdoch ponied up the money where would the revenue come from? Car sales around the world have tanked, down 40 percent in the United States, retail sales in the UK have plummeted, advertising revenue at major free to air broadcasters has also dropped alarmingly.

No, the only hope is for the IOC to somehow rise above the gathering storm, an achievement that would be akin to defying financial gravity. □

It all began in Melbourne 1956

The rights genie got out of the bottle at the 1956 Olympic Games in Melbourne.

Since then the genie has become morbidly obese as broadcast rights hit the stratosphere. And though world broadcasters would wish it to be so there is no way the genie is going to be re-corked.

Melbourne offers us the historical relief to what we are seeing today.

Those were the games when a rights fee of 25,000 pounds was accepted by the Melbourne Organising Committee from cinema news reel companies. The deal eventually collapsed but the IOC suddenly realised the potential value in television rights and immediately set about selling them for the following games in Rome.

The EBU, representing 18 countries, paid the staggering sum of US\$700,000 to broadcast 1960's Games, and they have been paying ever since: US\$443 million for the recent Beijing Games.

There is another very serious risk for the IOC in its painful separation from the EBU: the fate of many sports that European broadcasters faithfully support in the four years between the Summer Games, such as Athletics, Rowing, Skiing, Equestrian, Gymnastics, etc.

The question is will the EBU continue to provide free-to-air coverage of Olympic sports knowing that by doing so they would be building value for another rights holder.

Without access to free-to-air audiences what will the federations, who are responsible for the

management and marketing of those sports, do to retain the loyalty of the fans.

There is no question that the pay industry cannot deliver the eyeballs that are demanded by sponsors and advertisers. And why would the pay operators, if they obtained the gatekeeper rights, want to vigorously pass on the free to air rights.

If the rights were sold to an agency who's going to give them a bank guarantee in such grim times.

There is no way of knowing how much further down the economic slippery slope we are going to slide. How much more public money will be needed to prop up failing institutions and major industries. How severe the drop in broadcast revenue is going to be.

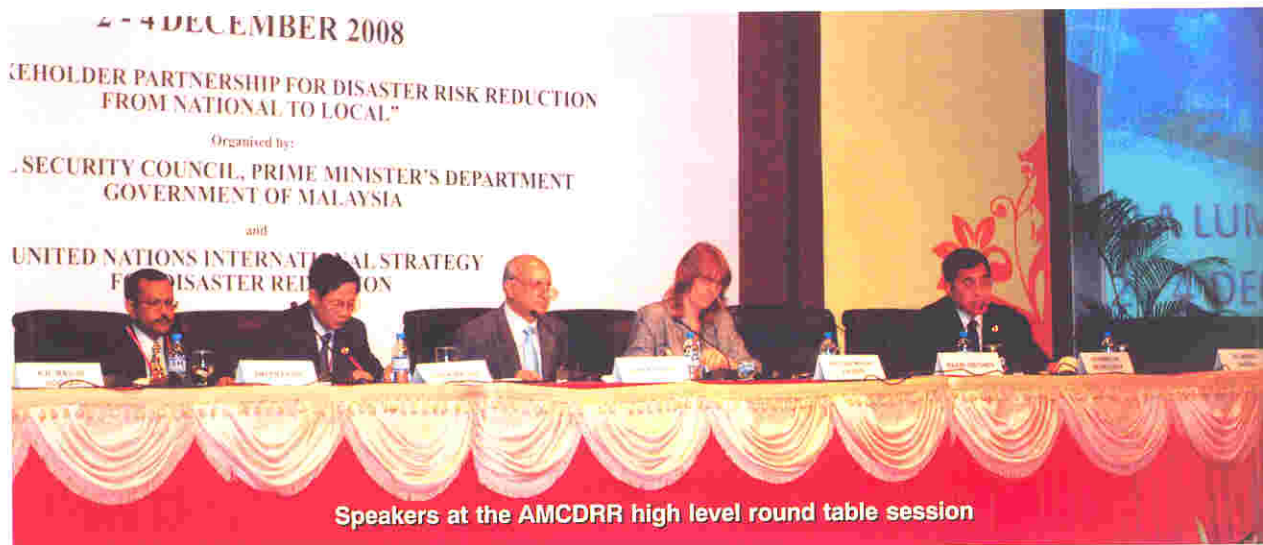
Already we are feeling the heat in Asia as broadcasters scale back their coverage of the next Winter Olympics in Vancouver citing future budget concerns as the reason.

The EBU has good reason to be aggrieved. One of the original 'family members' it has contributed billions to the IOC, and single handedly built the brand value in the five rings across the Continent.

But as we know family life is full of major and minor crises. We are tied to places, events and histories, which etch into the memory and personality. It's difficult to imagine anything more nourishing to the soul.

As the guardian of the Olympic family the IOC might want to consider those sentiments as it moves into uncharted waters. □

Asian media looks at disaster risk reduction



Speakers at the AMCDRR high level round table session

Concerned over the increased vulnerability of Asian communities, top level representatives from over 80 Asian countries gathered on 2 December in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia for a three-day 'Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction' (AMCDRR) to discuss policies and measures to reduce the impact of disasters in this part of the world.

According to the Centre of Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), 2008 has been a particularly tumultuous year for Asia, with more than 230,000 people killed and over 47 million affected by two natural disasters: the Sichuan earthquake in China and Cyclone Nargis in Myanmar.

Speaking on the role of media in reducing the impact of disasters, Brigitte Leoni, Media Relations at the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), urged media to report on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) before disasters happen.

"Media need to be proactive before and after disasters. Disaster is often

covered in a very factual way. What is good is to think about how could we cover disaster beyond mere facts, why did it happen, how can it be averted and who is responsible for it."

"As media members ourselves, we have the responsibility to inform, alert, investigate and educate people on DRR. If this is done, more lives can be saved," Ms Leoni said.

Media's responsibility

Echoing Ms Leoni, President of RPN 9 Philippines, Orly Mercado, suggested that integrating DRR messages as a segment of the daily news and in advertisement slots were among the initiatives media could embark on to create awareness among the general public.

Ms Leoni and Mr Mercado were among the speakers at the 'Media Training on Disaster Risk Reduction' which was held concurrently with the ministerial conference. The workshop was organised by the ABU in partnership with UNISDR. It looked at various angles in DRR coverage.

Thirteen broadcast journalists took part in the workshop, from Bangladesh, BBS-Bhutan, CNR-China, RTM-Malaysia, TV3-Malaysia, NTV-Malaysia, NTV-Nepal, PTV-Pakistan, RPN 9-Philippines, CNA-Singapore and VTV-Vietnam.

The ABU's Development Projects Department and Technical Department also led a round table and technical session to highlight the importance of early warning broadcasting systems in the region.

The key recommendations from the two sessions were incorporated into the final declaration, urging regional and national disaster reduction stakeholders to integrate DRR into national, sectoral and national and sectoral planning.

The declaration also called for the promotion of training workshops for media representatives and journalists to generate public awareness on disaster reduction and disaster preparation and to develop early warnings for the Asia-Pacific region. The next ministerial conference will be held in Incheon, South Korea in 2010.