

(from previous page)

“ Broadcasters with good content are the ones with a bright future ”

It's been a huge learning curve. Countries that are planning to go digital early like Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines will spend around 12 months on planning, four to five years to roll out, and then only comes the final analogue switch-off.

Q. When will we see most countries in the world be fully digitised?

In the next three to four years, major ASEAN countries will do that. Then smaller countries will eventually switch-off their analogue services between 2015 to 2017; others will do so in 2020. Start ups for most countries will be in the next one to two years. Malaysia has an ambitious and visionary plan to get it done by 2012.

In fact, it's good to have an ambitious plan, it's good to get the impetus moving. That's what needed in a lot of countries, getting past the point of the initial discussion and into the 'how' and not the 'why' stage.

Q. How does the picture of the 'digital age' look in your mind, when it eventually materialises or matures?

Great question! I believe that terrestrial wireless delivery systems have the potential to deliver much content of different types on the same spectrum. It's more than just traditional TV. A digital terrestrial TV transmission system is a big broadband pipe with each multiplex capable of delivering in excess of 20Mbps of data to mass audiences – so in an area where there are five to 10 multiplexes the potential capacity is greater than 100Mbps to 200Mbps. With various return paths (mobile and internet) readily available there are all sorts of business opportunities for broadcasters and their partners to harvest.

As technology evolves, the compression system evolves, we're going to see a fantastic cross platform opportunity with different types of features developed and higher capacities possible.

Once we've moved into that digital world, things will move very quickly... features, innovations, ideas from all over the world, can be brought into different markets, where they are relevant. While we say each market is different, each consumer is different; there is in fact a lot of common behaviour which can be leveraged.

Q. In the past years concern over telco companies offering TV programmes online has become a much debated topic. The line between telcos and traditional broadcasters is blurring. What is your take on this?

First of all we ought to ask what are broadcasters good at? Making rich, high value content. Broadcasters are in the value chain of developing content,

while the telcos have the ability to get the content to the people. Networks and relationships are their forte.

There are telcos that have tapped onto the media market and are doing well, but that's more of an aggregation of content, not so much a production of content. In many ways it's complementary. It's a point of aggregation – good content being delivered on effective mediums. It's about broadcasters with rich content and telcos with effective channels. Although sometimes there would be competitive overlaps, sometimes it would be collaborative overlaps. There's no one answer to that, it's a big ball of spaghetti, and from country to country this spaghetti would be woven in a different way.

It's all about having more quality content – and quality content should be delivered to consumers with a light cost.

Broadcasters ought to have self-confidence in the content they produce and should concentrate on this – that is producing more quality content, and future proof it in HD format.

Q. What's next, Super HD?

There will be all sorts of technology challenges in our industry along the line. We should embrace, recognise and deal with them. We need to not confuse our business with following the technologies. Technology should eventually follow the business even if in the early days it can be the technology development that stimulates the thinking.

Broadcasters with good content are the ones with a bright future. Producing 'the highest quality with the lowest cost' is what the business is all about. Sometimes we get do distracted by technology rather than the business; the idea that everything will be on satellite, IPTV or the Internet does not matter. In years to come, delivery platforms will be many, and good content must be on as many platforms as possible.

Q. How would you respond to "Let's sit back and wait for the next big wave of technology innovation to come around"?

There's no place for sitting back and waiting – the hardest step in digital is the first one – it gets easier after that. Waiting for something better may work once you have digitised but not when you are still in the analogue world.

As the world becomes a more integrated place, we are enjoying, sharing and allowing content from other countries to be shown on channels in different places. All these possibilities are wonderful and it is digital technology that makes this happen. ●

“ In fact, it's good to have an ambitious plan, it's good to get the impetus moving. That's what needed in a lot of countries, getting past the point of the initial discussion and into the 'how' and not the 'why' stage ”

ABU Prizes on Climate Change and HIV/AIDS 2009

CALL FOR ENTRIES



ABU Prizes on Climate Change 2009

Supported by



ABU Prizes on HIV/AIDS 2009

Supported by



Open to all ABU members in both
Radio and TV categories
(maximum 2 entries from each member)

Eligible Programme Format:

Climate Change Reporting -
News & Documentary
HIV/AIDS Reporting -
All formats

Eligible Programme Duration:

Not more than 60 minutes

Submission Entry Format:

TV entries - DVD
Radio entries - Audio CD
English script & completed entry form

Submission Deadline:

15th July 2009

**For more information and prize
guidelines, please contact:**

Ms Anom Sani

Tel: +603.2282.3592 ext 243

Fax: +603.2282.5292 or 4606

Email: anom@abu.org.my

ABU organises regional sports conference with AUB and EBU

The ABU has organised a joint conference of regional broadcasting unions to discuss sports issues, particularly the escalating costs of broadcast rights.

It will be held in late April in Mauritius in conjunction with the ABU's mid-year Sports Group meeting, and will be sponsored by MBC.

The ABU, the African Union of Broadcasters (AUB) and the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) will take part in this joint event which is scheduled for 27 April with each union preparing a topic and speakers.

"The timing of the Fifa World Cup (it will be held in South Africa next year) will have a great bearing on the discussions," ABU Director of Sport, John Barton said.

"Everyone in the region is very excited that South Africa is hosting the greatest football showpiece on earth. We know it will be a great success," he added.

Discussions will also be held on the high cost of sports acquisitions in light of the worldwide economic slump, the impact on European sport following the decision by the International Olympic Committee to end its 55-year partnership with the EBU, and whether peace can be achieved through sport.

"Property owners are still demanding ceiling high prices for their events, in spite of the worst economic conditions since the Great Depression," Mr Barton said.

He added that the high price of sports properties would likely dominate the debates.

"We hope that by taking a combined stand the broadcast unions can influence the decision makers where rights fees are concerned.

"Just like Wall Street, where the market is at a 12-year low, when the slide happens there appears to be no bottom. I would caution rights owners that the same financial gravity could quite pull down their events in the coming months and years," Mr Barton said. ●

Laos on course for staging the 25th SEA Games in Vientiane

All facilities at the 25th SEA Games sports complex in Vientiane are now more than 80 percent complete, according to the official organisers.

The 125-hectare sports complex is located in Dongsanghine village, in the Xaythany district of Vientiane, and houses the main stadium with a seating capacity of 20,000, which will be used for the football and track and field events and for the opening and closing ceremonies.

Other venues at the site comprise two indoor stadiums, each with a seating capacity of 3,000, an indoor swimming pool, tennis courts, and a shooting range.

Construction began in October 2007, with an US\$80 million budget provided in a joint venture project

between the Lao government and the China Development Bank.

The site manager Kiengkham Phoutchanhthavongsa said organisers were confident all venues would be finished in March.

Following that there would be three months of checks of the facilities at all venues in the complex to make sure everything was functioning properly. The schedule of tests would run from April to June.

The upgrading of other facilities, including indoor and football stadiums to be used for competition and training, is also on schedule he said.

Meanwhile, work has finished on a new sports training centre on an 11-hectare site in Sikeud village, Naxaithong district.

The centre cost more than 35 billion kip (US\$4 million) to build, and was financed by grant aid from the government of Vietnam.

The centre comprises an office, sleeping quarters for athletes, a running track and playing field, a football pitch, a gymnasium and other facilities for sporting events. Up to 200 athletes will be able to train there every day.

Construction is also in progress on the athletes' village, which is located on a 42,000sqm site at the Dongdok campus, National University of Laos. It is scheduled for completion in August.

The Olympic Council of Malaysia (OCM) has confirmed that Laos will host 26 sports and not 25 in the SEA Games from Dec 9-18.

The OCM Secretary General, Sieh Kok

Chi, said that recent reports were wrong and gave a picture that some sports had been dropped arbitrarily by the hosts.

"Some even claim that archery, cycling and weightlifting were omitted from the programme of the 25th Games in Vientiane," he said.

Mr Sieh added that for archery, there will be eight events — four more than in the Olympic Games with the inclusion of the compound bows competitions for men's and women's team and individual.

"There will be no track cycling events as Laos do not have a velodrome but road cycling and mountain bike racing have been included with a total of eight gold medals at stake," he said.

Basketball and water polo may still be included as there are discussions on the Philippines and Singapore to fund them at the Games. ●

Sports training for ABU broadcasters – a key initiative

The ABU Secretary-General, David Astley, says that training in sports broadcasting will become a key initiative in the ABU in the coming years.

In a welcoming message to participants at the first 'Sports Commentary Workshop' in Sri Lanka Mr Astley said training was an essential part of the ABU's commitment.

"We are committed to raising the standards of sports production. An important ingredient of that is commentary and presentation.

"While our broadcasters have continued to improve at major events such as the Olympics and Asian Games there was still more that could be done," he said.

The workshop was jointly hosted by the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation (SLRC) and the National Olympic Committee of Sri Lanka in Colombo. Forty participants from throughout the region attended the two-day course which was

"It provides broadcasters with a unique profile in what has become a very competitive and dynamic marketplace," he said.

Our participants would go away with all the skills that are required to give outstanding commentaries and professional presentations. And that would be evidenced not only in their local coverage of sport but on the much grander scale, the Olympic Games and other world events, he added.

In a special video address to the participants the President of the International Olympic Committee, Jacques Rogge, said training played a vital role in the search for excellence at the Summer and Winter Olympic Games.

While there had been tremendous advances in technology over the decades, the human element still had the most impact, he told participants.

Speaking from the IOC headquarters in Lausanne Mr Rogge said: "IOC could

"Training plays a vital role in the search for excellence"

or discipline. The central aim of the course was to equip trainees with the knowledge that would:

- Quickly improve commentary and reporting abilities
- Guide them in live or recorded presentations from a venue, studio or other location
- Enhance their professional reputation, and that of their company, as a leader in sports television, and the enhancement of its profile which would drive revenue for commercial broadcasters, and audience loyalty for those who do not sell airtime
- Give them a knowledge base that could be passed on to others

On completion of the course each participant was presented with a course manual and a certificate of completion. ●

Channel NewsAsia celebrates 10 years

Channel NewsAsia, the Singapore-based news channel, marked its 10th anniversary with a range of on-air and online initiatives.

Singapore's largest broadcaster, MediaCorp, launched the channel on 1 March 1999 with the aim of providing an Asian perspective on the region and the world.

To mark the anniversary it added a special section to its website: www.channelnewsasia.com/10/. This included its choice of the top 10 news events of the past decade.

The channel is also carrying a range of 10th anniversary programmes during the year including a series of profiles of Asian business leaders, and a series on Asian brand names.

Woon Tai Ho, Managing Director, News, MediaCorp, said: "We made it to 10 years. It is a significant milestone considering we were a latecomer to well established global news channels.

"We are now known for providing a viable alternative to these channels. We are the only channel that looks at the world for an Asian audience."

Channel NewsAsia is now seen in more than 20 countries and territories across Asia. ●

"We are committed to raising the standards of sports production. An important ingredient of that is commentary and presentation"

run by internationally recognised sportscasters, Alan Marks of Australia, John Burgess of the UK and Les Murray of SBS-Australia.

Mr Marks, who has published a book on Sports Commentary, and who has run more than a dozen similar courses in the past, said the value of training and knowledge transfer was paramount in the overall development of broadcast organisations.

not have been happier with the results we achieved at the recent games in Beijing and the role that you played.

"As you know the Olympic philosophy has, as its essence, the development of the human spirit; the binding of man in the common pursuit of friendship and harmony," he said.

The workshop was divided into eight sessions over two days with each session focusing on a separate topic

An attack with military precision and a clear knowledge of how a TV station worked

By John Barton



Most of the broadcasting machines were damaged after the attack

The ground shifted dangerously under my feet, like I was on out of control on a skating rink. Each step was threatened to upend me.

Yet this was a master control room (MCR), though barely recognisable from when I used to oversee the station's output back in the 90's.

In the midst of darkness and charred ruins, and laying all round, were ball bearings. The type you use if you want to kill someone, or inflict serious bodily damage. They came out of a bomb, a claymore.

In this case the target was machines and not man. Machines that provide the crucial link between the nerve centre of a television station (MCR) and the viewing public.

Strike at MCR, and you cut the heart out of a broadcast facility.

At least, that's what a gang of 20 hooded, and heavily armed terrorists thought when they attacked Sri Lanka's leading commercial television and radio operation at Depanama, on the outskirts of Colombo.

The facility is the home to MTV and MBC networks owned by the Maharaja Organisation Limited and where TV and radio channels are broadcast in English, Sinhala and Tamil languages.

Just after 2.30 am on 6 January this year, the gang, operating in two groups of ten, broke into the station. They overpowered the station's security staff and herded the late night employees of about 30 together, stressing that it was not their intention to cause them harm. They didn't. No one was injured.

Bristling with automatic weapons, the type used in the ongoing conflict in Sri Lanka, one group was led to MCR where they thought they could silence the journalists and announcers who had been covering the civil war for many years.

They racked the equipment with automatic high caliber weapons for about ten minutes, before setting the claymore bomb and petrol canisters.

Meanwhile the other gang members were in the TX room (transmission) which is where the real damage could have been done if they had known anything about the technical side of getting pictures and sound to the transmitters.

Eyeing a forest of patch cables and assorted equipment they thought they had struck gold. But it was fool's gold. After destroying the visible machines with gunfire they left assuming they had dealt a mortal blow to MTV and MBC.

What they missed was the fibre rack. Now, had they blasted that to smithereens, then Depanama would not have got back on air so quickly.

Within hours a small team of broadcast engineers had dug up some old analogue gear, patched it with unused cables and threw the switch. Rather than black out the channels for weeks, perhaps even months, MTV and MBC were back on air telling the incredulous public of Sri Lanka the events of that night. ●



Asoka Dias, the General Manager at Depanama, is still shaking at the thought of what might have happened to his staff.

"When one of the terrorists put a gun to the head of my transmission engineer I thought that we in for it," he told me.

"Take us to MCR," said the man in a balaclava and clutching an automatic weapon.

"They knew exactly where they wanted to go and what they would do when they got there," he said.

He said the attack had been well planned and executed, as if they had undergone operational training specifically for the Depanama facility.

"They spoke to us with authority and in a manner that suggested some of them had a military background. The way they stood and carried their weapons was also a signature of who they might have been," Mr Dias said. ●

2009: Asia's Year of Living Sport

Asia will be the focus for three major multi-sport events this year making the region one of the most dynamic in the world.

The first will be in July, from 16 to 26, when Taiwan stages the World Games in the south west city of Kaohsiung, the nation's second largest.

The World Games attracts up to 45,000 athletes who will compete in a 32 sport programme involving ball sports, martial arts, precision, strength and trend sports.

Taiwan was awarded the games in an effort to improve cross strait relations with China and the latter has been very active in providing support to the organising committee following the great success of the Beijing Olympics.

The World Games is one of the biggest events on the global sporting calendar. It is a first for Taiwan, which has never staged such a complex event.

Kaohsiung, a gritty Taiwan industrial city of 1.6 million, is months away from finishing 23 venues, including a giant bowling alley and a bay for life-saving competitions, and those for billiards, dragon boat racing and tug-of-war.

The event has been sanctioned by the International Olympic Committee. Athletes and officials from over 90 countries will descend on the city giving Taiwan its moment in the sporting sunshine.



Spectators from many nations will converge on Kaohsiung

"The sports get exposure, and so do the country and the city," Ron Froehlich, President of the International World Games Federation, he said. More than 500,000 spectators have attended past events, he said.

"Everything is rolling and on schedule." ●

Hong Kong prepares to stage the East Asian Games



Meanwhile not far across the straits Hong Kong is readying for its major event – the 5th East Asian Games, which will be held in December.

With less than a year to go to the Opening Ceremony of the Hong Kong 2009 East Asian Games (EAG), the organisers of the Games' Volunteer Programme have already recruited about 1,300 volunteers.

Timothy Fok, Chairman of the 5th East Asian Games Planning Committee, said the Volunteer

Programme had received fantastic support from the local community since it was launched last May.

"Hong Kong's volunteers worked very well and professionally in the 2008 Beijing Olympics and Equestrian Events in August. They were highly praised by the community, athletes, and visitors from around the world. I hope Hong Kong people will keep on the selfless spirit to give, assist and together we make the Hong Kong 2009 East Asian Games a success," he added.

The games will be held from December 5 to 13, with more than 3,000 athletes from nine countries and regions of East Asia taking part in over 1,700 competitions, to vie for 281 gold medals in 23 sports, the largest yet for an East Asian Games. ●



The spectacular night-time skyline of Hong Kong

NEED A
U-MATIC
PLAYER?
NHK
CAN
HELP

How many 3/4 inch videotapes are there in your organisation? Do you still keep a U-matic video player to play them?

The machine was widely used in many TV stations in the 1970s and 1980s, but nowadays it is considered an 'extinct species' because so many of them were destroyed or abandoned as the technology was overtaken by a myriad of new formats.

However, good news came recently from NHK-Japan. NHK says that Japanese dubbing company YOKOCINE D.I.A. whose biggest client is NHK still has a few surviving U-matic players in the PAL format in good condition. Although demand for the machines is low these days, engineers have been maintaining and inspecting them regularly in spite of the difficulty of obtaining spare parts. They are proud that the machines are still working normally.

This is good news for people involved in archives. If you urgently need to copy from old 3/4 inch videotapes to digital beta tapes, you can use these machines. NHK says the cost of dubbing from 3/4 tapes to other formats is about US\$ 90 per hour. ◆

For more details please contact the ABU Programme Department.

New faces at the ABU



Siva Kumar, a Malaysian, joined the ABU as Senior Systems Support Officer in January. With 10 years experience in information technology, Siva is a specialist in the development, implementation, management and support of information systems and networking.

Before joining the ABU, Siva was with a civil engineering consultancy, where he was responsible for the firm's IT systems and operations.

Siva is also a Microsoft certified professional majoring in electrical and electronic engineering.



Letchumi Achanah joined the Organisation's Program Department in January. She will be working primarily with the Department to help the child abuse cases.

She has a Bachelor's degree in Mass Communication with a major in Broadcasting from University Putra Malaysia.

Letchumi was with ASTRO-Malaysia, as an editor and with Kuala Lumpur-based Asia Media Monitors news monitoring agency for almost three years before she joined the ABU.



Suresh Vanan joined the ABU as a Senior Systems Support Officer in January. He will be working primarily with the Department to help the child abuse cases.

Suresh is Malaysian and holds a Master in Business Administration (MBA) from Edith Cowan University, Australia.

A sports enthusiast, Suresh also helps out with NGOs that promote human values in his spare time. ◆



A staff member at NHK-Japan showing the precious few U-matic players at its studio