



Broadcasters want faster disaster alerts

Asian broadcasters have called for quicker disaster warnings from government authorities in the wake of the tsunami horror.

At a three-day workshop in Tokyo, ABU broadcast journalists and engineers said ways of receiving prompt warnings governments and international agencies must be established.

They said it took too long for some broadcasters to be able to confirm the early information they received about the 26 December tsunami from non-official sources.

"Fast, accurate information from government agencies will enable broadcasters to report the true magnitude of a disaster promptly without sensationalising it," participants said in a declaration issued at the end of the meeting.

Broadcasters had a duty, too, to educate people about natural disasters. "Before 26 December, most people knew little about a tsunami and the devastation it can cause."

It was also the role of broadcasters to calm people down after a natural disaster struck, as well as prevent panic and the spread of rumours, the declaration said.



A tsunami floodgate in Shizuoka in central Japan

The workshop on Natural Disasters and the Broadcaster's Role took place in Tokyo from 28 February to 2 March. NHK-Japan hosted it, and organised it jointly with the ABU.

It brought together about 40 broadcasters from 15 Asian countries and regions, including senior representatives of the national broadcasters in the five worst-hit countries – Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand and Malaysia.

A Sri Lankan journalist described how his station received an eye-witness report of the tsunami hitting the

island's south coast, but was delayed in reporting it fully owing to a lack of official information.

"We could not contact our staff, police or local authorities. All phone lines were dead. Information was sketchy at first – we did not know the tsunami was so huge."

An Indonesian journalist said that since 26 December, his organisation and the Indonesian meteorological agency had agreed on the need to speed up the disaster early warning system in the republic.

(cont'd on page 4)

General Assembly exhibition sells out

For the first time in its 41-year history, the ABU will hold an exhibition in conjunction with its annual General Assembly which is to be held in Hanoi, Vietnam.

The exhibition would present the chance for selected programme distributors, equipment manufacturers and media suppliers to gain access to the high-level broadcast executive fraternity attending the General Assembly.

The decision to hold the exhibition, from 26 to 28 November, proved to be a hit with ABU members, as all of the exhibition booths were taken up within hours of its announcement.

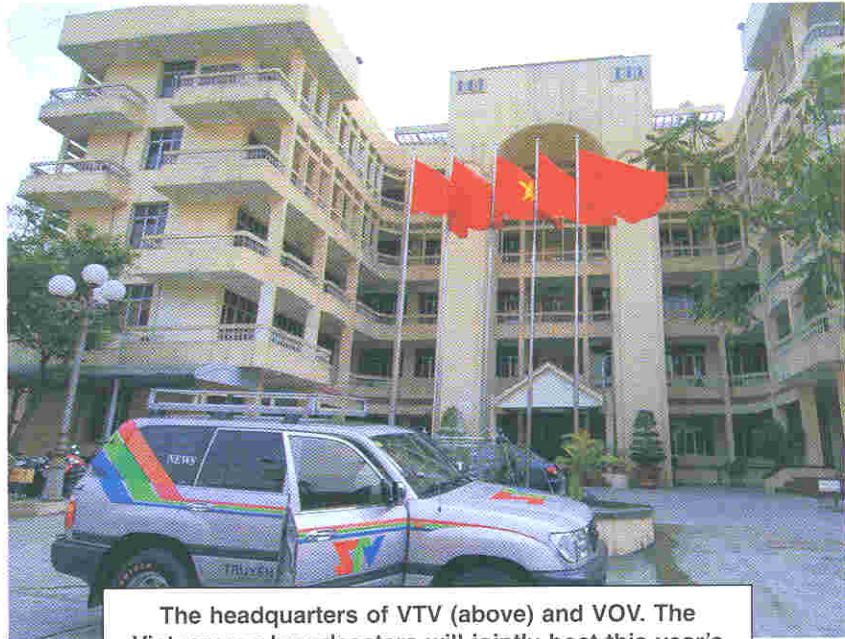
ABU Secretary-General, David Astley, said nearly all of the exhibition booths were booked within hours of the event brochure being sent to members.

“There clearly is a demand for such an event to be held in conjunction with the General Assembly, so more exhibition space would be sought for next year’s General Assembly to be held in Beijing,” Mr Astley said.

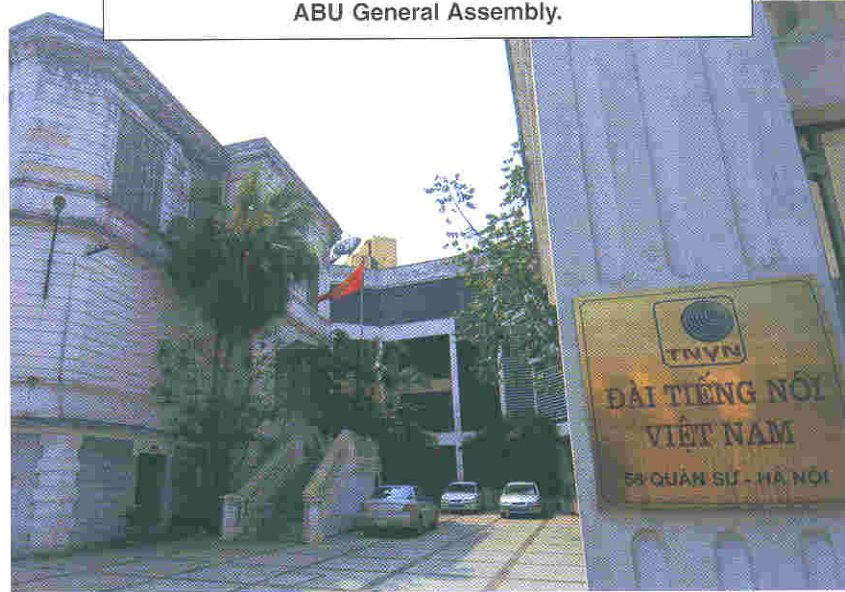
However, he added that there were still some sponsorship opportunities left for other General Assembly events. More details on this are available on the ABU website at <http://www.abu.org.my/public/compiled/p572.htm>.

The idea to include the exhibition into the annual event was conceived to offer ABU members space to demonstrate their own content or services. As this is the first time such a venture is being undertaken, exhibition space is limited.

Sponsors and exhibitors for the maiden event will get networking



The headquarters of VTV (above) and VOV. The Vietnamese broadcasters will jointly host this year’s ABU General Assembly.



opportunities with over 300 top broadcasting executives and key decision makers in the Asia-Pacific region.

They will also get additional visibility through the ABU website, publications such as Technical Review and ABU News, and the weekly e-newsletter.

The annual meetings in Hanoi will be jointly hosted by Voice of Vietnam (VOV) and Vietnam Television (VTV) and the date of the meetings will be from

21 to 28 November. The Administrative Council meeting will be held on 24 November while the three-day General Assembly proper will commence on 26 November.

This is the first time that Vietnam will host an ABU General Assembly or Administrative Council meeting. VOV and VTV stepped in to host the event after Prasar Bharati said it was unable to host the 2005 General Assembly in India as planned. □

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Meanwhile, a journalist from India said broadcasters there had not carried a tsunami warning. "If we had, perhaps people could have moved to safer areas. But there was no system to give us a warning."

Few people in Thailand knew what a tsunami was or what its effects were, a Thai journalist said. More cooperation among broadcasters on exchanging disaster information was needed. "During the early stages, nobody realised how serious it was. And we had no information to warn them."

For reporters covering the disaster, the experience was draining. Senior journalists described how they broke down in tears while preparing their news reports.

Participants in the workshop toured NHK's news facilities to see how it covers disasters, and were briefed by the head of the News Department's Disaster and Safety Information Centre, Tomio Kojima.

They later toured Japanese disaster prevention centres, including the Japan Meteorological Agency, for a close look at how authorities issue information as quickly as possible on the many natural disasters that hit the country.



Two Thai journalists check out the control panel at NHK's disaster alert desk

Participants also visited the port of Numazu in Shizuoka prefecture, southwest of Tokyo, where a huge tsunami floodgate was completed last September – at a cost of US\$43 million – to protect residential areas.

Opening the workshop, NHK's new President, Genichi Hashimoto, said the Japanese broadcaster had worked for years with government agencies to try to ensure prompt reporting of disasters.

NHK would be glad to share with other Asian broadcasters the experience it had gained in this area, he said.

Referring to the 26 December tragedy, NHK's Managing Director, Mamoru Morohoshi, described the workshop as "an expression of our determination never to allow the recurrence of such a disaster".

The ABU News Group Chairman, Johari Achee, said that with the tsunami disaster, the role of broadcasters in serving humanity had entered a new dimension.

More than one speaker cited a Japanese saying: The second disaster happens when you forget the first. □



Workshop participants listening intently to a briefing on Japan's tsunami warning system



ABU broadcasters at the Japan Meteorological Agency

Small NHK station has big disaster role

For NHK's Shizuoka station, preparing for disasters has a special importance – the station lies in the heart of an earthquake zone.

Shizuoka prefecture is located in the Tokai region of central Japan, southwest of Tokyo, which has seen a number of major earthquakes over the centuries.

The last was in 1854, and many experts believe another quake will strike the region sooner rather than later.

This is why NHK's Shizuoka station, which is a relatively small local station, is right at the forefront of the Japanese public broadcaster's disaster preparedness drive.

ABU broadcasters who visited the station in March during the workshop on natural disasters saw how TV monitors and other equipment are securely fastened down to prevent damage during an earthquake.

Senior staff told the visitors that one of the station's highest priorities was



An NHK news crew covers the visit to Shizuoka

to give its audience prompt information on earthquakes and tsunamis.

The station – which has a staff of 200 including 70 part-timers – airs a special programme on disasters every week.

It plans to launch a service soon to provide disaster information by mobile phone messaging.

The station conducts regular equipment maintenance and disaster prevention drills to ensure its infrastructure can withstand an earthquake.

The workshop participants also visited the Shizuoka prefectural government offices for a briefing on disaster preparedness, and braved a simulated earthquake at a nearby disaster education centre. □



Broadcast journalists rushing to file their stories before their deadlines



Top: A securely fastened TV monitor
Below: HDTV outside broadcast vans at Shizuoka station



Co-production on tsunami aftermath launched

Broadcasters in the tsunami-affected countries have joined forces to produce a new ABU documentary, *Tsunami Aftermath: The Road to Recovery*, which is expected to tell the story of the survivors' efforts to recover from the disaster.

The tsunami that struck Asia on 26 December caused devastation on a scale that had not been seen for decades. It has been said that it will take at least 10 years for the affected areas to fully recover. Against this backdrop of catastrophe, many wonder how the reconstruction of the affected areas will proceed. How will those affected recover from the disaster?

Television will be an essential witness to this reconstruction. Broadcasters are in a position to help the people who are suffering by letting the world know of their situation and needs. More lives may be saved in the future by raising awareness of natural disasters and precautionary measures.

Bearing this in mind, the ABU Programme Department has invited broadcasters in the affected countries to produce a documentary programme that will focus on people's efforts to recover from the disaster.

So far, positive feedback has been received from seven broadcasters in the affected countries: TVRI and METRO TV in Indonesia; SLRC and ITN in Sri Lanka; MCOT in Thailand; TVM in Maldives and RTM in Malaysia. Besides these broadcasters, RTHK-Hong Kong has agreed to provide an Executive Producer who will supervise the project.

METRO TV was invited to join the project as it has shown keen interest



Participating producers for the *Tsunami Aftermath: Road to Recovery* project

in becoming an ABU member and has been carrying extensive coverage of the tsunami disaster.

The project's first producers' meeting, hosted by TVRI-Indonesia, was held in Jakarta on 28 and 29 March. The producers from the seven broadcasters presented their proposals and exchanged opinions and suggestions under the supervision of the Executive Producer, Clara Choi of RTHK.

Project proposals

The participants also discussed the guidelines for the project. On the second day of the meeting, they accepted five proposals:

- ITN-Sri Lanka will follow closely the recovery of Priyantha, a fisherman who lost his wife and four children, as well as his house and boat, when the tsunami struck. He has since been living in a tent and taking care of his surviving eight-year-old

daughter. But this anguished man is determined to return to the sea as soon as he can, even though about 75 percent of Sri Lanka's coastal belt was damaged by the tsunami. How will the lives of Priyantha and his daughter change in the following months? This programme will offer viewers a glimpse on the efforts by concerned parties to rebuild the people's lives there.

- SLRC-Sri Lanka will focus on another critical issue caused by the tsunami: homeless and traumatised children and orphans. Indica Harshani is a graduate who was sent by the Sri Lankan government to a refugee camp in Panadura on the island's west coast. She has been working hard to help the people there, especially young children. A pre-school has been opened but there is a great need for teachers, school uniforms, text books etc. The situation has not improved much, even though Indica and others like her work long hours day after day.

- METRO TV-Indonesia plans to portray conflicts between landowners and urban planners over land ownership. The tsunami destroyed more than 11,200 hectares of land in Aceh and the Indonesian government estimates that it will have to accommodate 300,000 displaced people in the province. Loss of land documents, disputes over land inheritance, land boundaries without ownership titles, and peoples' reluctance to move away from their old homes create all sorts of difficulties for the post-tsunami rehabilitation and reconstruction in Banda Aceh and other towns in the province.
- MCOT-Thailand will follow Yangyong as the main subject of its story to see how resort owners and their staff have suffered after the tsunami struck, and how they are going to rebuild their businesses on the two-kilometre beachfront of Khao Lak. The Thai government has ordered all hotels to reopen by the year end. However, three months have passed since the tsunami hit, and small resort owners still face many

uncertainties while waiting for the government to speed up assistance and guidelines on redevelopment.

- TVM-Maldives will use a different angle for this co-production series. Some 200 residents of Madifushi abandoned their devastated island and moved to the bigger island of Maamigili a week after the tsunami. Madifushi residents who had lost virtually everything last December are now eagerly waiting to move in to their new houses which will be completed by September. They are now better off socially and economically on the new island. On the other hand, the people of Maamigili have warmly welcomed the newcomers who have expanded the island's sparse population. This is a unique story about resettlement and a new community formed by the devastating tsunami.
- TVRI-Indonesia and RTM-Malaysia are expected to revise their proposals based on the discussion at the first producers' meeting and submit them by mid-April.

"I am really impressed by the devotion and the earnestness of the participating members. Most of them have spent a lot of effort to conduct research and come up with good ideas," said RTHK's Ms Choi.

"When listening to the presentation of their proposals, I could feel their passion and determination for this co-production project. I feel extremely comfortable working with the producers."

Each participant will produce, towards the end of the year, a 30-minute documentary at its own cost and exchange these programmes. Once the project's proposals are finalised, the Programme Department will invite ABU members outside the tsunami-affected countries to join the project by providing a suitable programme of their own.

Besides exchanging the programmes among the participants, the department also plans to distribute the series to other ABU members as well as non-members, subject to the approval of the participants. □

Radio Netherlands sends mobile radio stations to Aceh

Radio Netherlands has sent three mobile radio stations to the Indonesian province of Aceh, the region which was worst hit by the Asian tsunami disaster.

The mobile units will enable three RN partner stations in Banda Aceh, Meulaboh and the island of Nias to resume their broadcast operations.

The partner stations were completely destroyed by the tsunami

which struck on 26 December following an undersea earthquake off Aceh.

"It is really important that the radio stations in Aceh get back on the air as soon as possible.

"Radio is an important means of communication in Aceh and a major source of information for listeners," RN Director-General Jan Hoek said.

He said the mobile radio stations have been sent to Aceh on a loan basis.

Once RN's partner stations are able to resume using their own facilities, the mobile units will be deployed to other parts of the world for training purposes or in connection with other natural disasters.

Apart from that, RN has been financially helping staff of its partner stations who survived the disaster.

It has also been providing training courses for new and existing employees of these stations. □

RTHK collecting 30,000 radio sets for tsunami survivors

RTHK-Hong Kong is working with Salvation Army Hong Kong to collect 30,000 radio sets from the public.

This follows an appeal by the ABU to donate battery-powered radio sets to survivors of the Asian tsunami.

The broadcaster has been making on-air appeals since 8 March to encourage the people of Hong Kong to drop off usable radio sets at RTHK as well as at 10 Salvation Army collection centres across the city.

Through the "RTHK & ABU Radio Aid" campaign, the station expects to deliver the first batch of radio sets to Aceh in Sumatra soon. This will be done with the help of Indonesian national carrier Garuda Indonesia.

"It's not just about giving away radio sets. We believe it's about giving the survivors a chance to access important



RTHK staff posing with radio sets collected from the donation drive. With them is David Astley and Chu Pui Hing

news about their country and the outside world," RTHK Director of Broadcasting Chu Pui Hing said at a recent press conference.

Also present were ABU Secretary-General David Astley and Salvation Army Hong Kong & Macau Command Major On Dieu Quang. □

Singapore & Malaysia broadcasters revive joint concerts

The national broadcasters of Singapore and Malaysia have revived their joint musical concert series after an eight-year gap, *Channel NewsAsia* has reported.

The idea of a joint musical gala goes back to the 1980s when the national broadcaster of Singapore, MediaCorp – then the Singapore Broadcasting Corporation (SBC) – and Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) jointly produced "Rampaisari".

The programme was suspended eight years ago.

However, the information ministers of the two countries met in Kuala Lumpur in December 2004 and agreed to resume the musical concert series.

Singapore's Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts, Dr Lee Boon Yang, said the show was an opportunity for MediaCorp and RTM to work together to bring the best

talents in Singapore and Malaysia to share the stage.

Malaysia's Information Minister, Abdul Kadir Sheikh Fadzir, said: "This show aims to bring Malaysia and Singapore closer."

The ministers were among those who watched the two-hour concert titled "Muzika Ekstravaganza" telecast live simultaneously on MediaCorp's TV12 Suria and RTM's TV1 recently. □

TVRI continues to aid tsunami survivors

Indonesia's national broadcaster, TVRI, is continuing to assist thousands of tsunami survivors camped inside its compound in the stricken city of Banda Aceh.

A large park on high ground in the compound offered a safe haven after the tsunami struck on 26 December, prompting large numbers of people take refuge there.

The park quickly became one of largest refugee camps in the city. Now known as TVRI Camp, it houses about 5,000 people who live in tents while waiting for the local authorities to relocate them.

TVRI gives the refugees clean drinking water and uses one of its generators to provide them with electricity. Relief agencies help cater for their other needs.

TVRI officials in Jakarta said assisting the refugees was placing a heavy strain on the broadcaster's resources, and that conditions in the camp were far from ideal. But TVRI would continue to do all it could to help them.

In the months since the tsunami, the camp has reflected both the horror of the tragedy and the resilience of the human spirit.

In the early days, some of the children in the camp were reunited with their overjoyed parents. A number of people in the camp have died but several babies have also been born there.

TVRI's local transmissions in the city of Padang were disrupted for almost a day by an earthquake on 10 April.

The quake, estimated at 6.7 on the Richter scale, had its epicentre at sea about 120km southwest of the West Sumatran city.



TVRI's Jakarta headquarters

No deaths were recorded, but the quake damaged programme control facilities and lighting at TVRI's Padang station, forcing it off the air.

A TVRI official in Jakarta described the damage to the station as serious. Repair work was delayed because some

TVRI staff stayed away from work the following day amid fears of fresh tremors or a tsunami.

Local journalists reported widespread panic in Padang after the earthquake, with large numbers of people fleeing to the hills west of the city. □

BBC News wins Peabody Award

BBC News has won a Peabody Award for its recent TV coverage of the crisis in the Darfur region of Sudan. It will receive the award at a special luncheon in New York on 16 May.

The BBC – an ABU member – had an extensive presence in Sudan last year. More than 25 BBC News teams filed despatches from Darfur and the refugee camps in neighbouring eastern Chad.

Head of BBC Newsgathering, Fran Unsworth, said: "We are delighted to have been given this important award. It recognises the value of a sustained

commitment to a difficult and tragic story in a remote and generally under-reported region of the world."

The Peabody Award is widely regarded as the most prestigious award in electronic media, selecting outstanding works from over a thousand entries from the United States and around the world.

The judges included TV critics, broadcasting industry executives and culture experts. They praised what they described as "searing reports from a team of BBC journalists who present and analyse the crisis situation". □

The ABU News Interview

When the coastal communities of Sri Lanka were hit by the tsunami on 26 December, the Sri Lanka Rupavahini Corporation (SLRC) spared no effort to get aid to the stricken survivors despite its limited resources. ABU News finds out from SLRC Director-General, Nishantha Ranatunga, how the national TV broadcaster responded when disaster struck.

Q: How did the tsunami affect SLRC and your staff?

NR: About 16 staff were affected by the tsunami, including a male employee from Matara who died in the train that was derailed. We immediately employed his brother in his place because the deceased was the sole breadwinner, supporting his mother and father. We also provided various assistance for the other 15 such as food, clothing and money. Now we are looking at rebuilding their houses and providing treatment and helping them recover from their ordeal. Apart from that, none of our stations were really damaged.

Q: How did SLRC react when news broke of the tragedy?

NR: I was travelling upstate for a holiday with my family when I got the call around 9.45am alerting me of the disaster. I immediately returned to Colombo and had a few meetings with the senior staff to plan our strategy to overcome the situation. We saw the immediate requirement and we started recruiting people to provide assistance. The first announcement (for assistance) went out at 4.30pm the same day.

Q: What was the extent of the role SLRC played in relaying information to the public?

NR: SLRC is the national channel and we have 94 percent coverage throughout the country, so we were instrumental (in disseminating information) and the response we got was quite tremendous. In terms of programming, we had programmes in the mornings and



The SLRC headquarters in Sri Lanka

evenings helping people to cope with and recover from this situation, featuring doctors and influential people. We also ran programmes showing locals and foreigners helping the community.

Q: How did SLRC work with the Sri Lankan government to coordinate disaster alerts and relief efforts?

NR: It was really a concerted effort. We supported the government in terms of relaying official messages and how Sri Lankans should react in this type of a situation. We got all the government officials and politicians to come in and talk to people. Whatever the strategies employed by the government, we communicated them to the people, running that channel 24 hours a day. Normally, we only run round-the-clock during the weekend since on weekdays, transmission usually ends at 12.30am and resumes at 6am. We also sent our crews out to get visuals that show what has really happened.

Q: How did SLRC help to coordinate the relief effort?

NR: When we made the announcements, people started bringing in the goods. We have a big ground to unload the goods and we asked assistance for transportation. Many people came with their own lorries and other vehicles, and we had about 350 lorries taking stuff to different areas. We had three plans: a short-term plan on providing cooked food and clothing, a middle-term plan on providing medicines and dry rations, and a long-term plan on helping survivors with housing facilities as well as provide children with school materials and library facilities. SLRC has about 800 staff and we had a special team working non-stop to provide relief. There were also 500 to 600 Sri Lankan volunteers helping us pack and send the relief items.

Q: Which area of need did SLRC specifically focus on?

NR: We really concentrated on the middle-term plan to provide

medicine, because that was needed the most at the time. We got tremendous response from people, both locally and internationally, and we collected over US\$3 million (LKR300 million) worth of medicines. We then got in touch with the health authorities and got their support. We also had a few doctors who helped us by packing and distributing everything without charging us. In the end, we started a communications and information centre, so that whatever we received was sent according to a specific plan of action. We requested items based on information that we got out of the affected areas. We have our correspondents in various places and we received feedback from them and from other respected sources such as priests and monks.

Q: How is the aid handled and dispersed to those that needed it most?

NR: The aid is handled in a very proper way. The government had some organisations to handle it through various committees. On top of that, there are political party leaders and other committees which were set up to help with the rehabilitation and other aspects such as sending food supplies and providing funding. All these are well coordinated and the response has been quite good.

Q: How did the other broadcasters in Sri Lanka respond to the disaster?

NR: Each broadcaster worked on its own at first, but there was a good response from everyone. After the

first month, all of us got together and came up with a four-hour programme. We had a tree-planting exercise and also various religious heads conducting a memorial service for the dead and for the people whose bodies were never found. We wanted everyone in the country to plant a tree because we wanted to educate the people of the importance of looking after the environment. We also got together because we wanted all Sri Lankans to unite and find a way out of this situation.

Q: There were rumours of a second tsunami hitting Sri Lanka shortly after the one which lashed the shores of the island on 26 December. How did SLRC help to quash them?

NR: We got in touch with the local authorities who were observing the situation and controlling (the alerts). So, we managed to get hourly updates on how things were moving. We were also keeping in touch with the authorities in Washington, USA, as they have first-hand information.

Q: What were the physical difficulties or obstacles that SLRC faced?

NR: One major setback of technological support in handling a situation like this involves distance. For instance, if something happens in a place situated some 200 to 300km from Colombo, we have to send our own vehicles as there is no way of getting things done in a quicker way since things like satellite feed are not clearly available.

Q: And how did you work around those setbacks?

NR: Our engineers were really working hard to receive the information any way they could. Live telecasts could not be arranged but we had our correspondents all over the country and we have a system of getting what they report back to our office as soon as possible. The information came over the phone and the pictures came through various modes of transportation. We also never looked at the commercial aspect of our coverage in the early stages of the disaster. We just wanted to concentrate on the tsunami tragedy without looking at our commercials or normal shows. It was only after the first month did we eventually get back to our normal programming.

Q: SLRC has major plans to go digital by the end of the year. How are the financial constraints caused by the effects of the tsunami going to affect this process?

NR: Digitalisation is the way to go. This is something we have been planning for the last one-and-a-half years, and implementing it is a long process. We need to conduct a lot of studies to see exactly what we have to do and which technology we are going to use. We have also been quite aggressive with our programming strategies and will continue to act on the plans that we want to implement despite these (financial) problems. We cannot deny that we had difficulties in January and February, but we will certainly bounce back. □

Scenes of devastation in Sri Lanka caused by the tsunami - SLRC Photos

