

# ABU's archiving showcase project: Preserving 'heritage' archives

**KUALA LUMPUR** – Preserving archives is one of the most urgent needs of broadcasters, more so within the public broadcasting organisations. Quite often, national records of historic value are involved in this. Failure to take action in the safeguarding and preservation of audio-visual archives will result in the loss of entire chapters of this heritage in less than 10 years, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) estimates.

It is understood that a number of such broadcasters need assistance in setting up of cost-effective methods of implementing archiving systems and in developing a universal metadata

In keeping with this context, the Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU) initiated the "UNESCO-ABU Archiving Showcase Project: Preserving 'Heritage' Archives" to organise and implement a digital archive from the ground level up. The project is also an opportunity to showcase the process to other broadcasters in the Asia-Pacific.

More specifically, the project aims to educate broadcast archiving, production and programming teams with proper information on the steps involved in digitally archiving audio-visual content. It will also train and disseminate information on the pilot scheme and, through information workshops, contribute to spreading the know-how among other broadcasters in the region.

Funded by UNESCO, the project is supported by Canal France International (CFI) and Bhutan Broadcasting Service (BBS).

## Project implementation

The project will be implemented in phases. The first phase will focus on assessing the existing analogue archives and its pro-

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cess. It will then provide recommendations — based on the findings — on how to go about with the digital conversion.

During this phase, participants will receive training on setting up a metadata scheme for cataloguing their archives to avoid a scenario that would see content saved but with little access as a result of poor indexing; as well as training on choosing the most appropriate digital format and media to use.

The second phase will focus on the hardware and software solutions chosen, training on the points to be considered will be imparted. In this phase, the participants will experience hands-on the procedures in implementing such a system as well as being involved in the digital conversion of archival material.

## Workshop

The first workshop on *Digitalising of Audiovisual Archives* was held at the BBS facility in Thimpu, Bhutan, in November last year. The workshop focused mainly on the initial steps of assessing the current status of archives and understanding the prerequisites in moving towards digitisation.

Michel Dazats, the work-



Workshop participants, together with Michel Dazats (standing extreme right), touring the TV and radio archives at the BBS facility.

shop's resource person, was an the prerequisites of setting up an archive system: Collecting information about the existing archive materials; storage conditions; labelling or identification system in use; the type of formats in use; and where the archives are stored or located.

Under his guidance, the participants, who were grouped into two, visited both the radio and TV archives at the BBS facility.

Based on the groups' assessments, it was seen that the BBS archives consisted of a variety of formats, from 16mm, 25mm and 30mm reels, U-Matic, Betacam and DVCam tapes to DVDs. The assessments further revealed that the BBS archives also lacked information on the exact quantity

of the material and its contents. In addition, the storage conditions were found not up to reasonable standards. The assessment also concluded that most of these results seem to complement the lack of technical and archiving know-how among the BBS staff.

In the next few sessions Dazats focused on explaining the fundamentals in preservation and digitisation techniques and methods. He also explained the need for a digitisation plan, topology and degradations, why broadcasters need to digitise their archives, the use of a methodological approach and considerations in choosing the archive location and its conditions.

The presentations further looked at some of the technical

details such as the essence and the right format and media for archiving.

Dazats also stressed the importance of having a sound framework on policy and priorities, as well as an understanding of human, time and financial requirements. It was highlighted that a good starting point would be to devise an applicable metadata schema and start organising and creating a proper database of existing archives. This would need the support of the production and news staff, in addition to staff working in the archives library.

A total of 23 participants from five countries attended the four-day workshop. They included participants from ABU members in Vietnam, Thailand, Cambodia and Sri Lanka as well as participants from Bhutan.

At the end of the workshop, the participants gained expert advice and understanding of the process and procedures to be followed in designing, and moving towards, digitising a conventional audio-visual archive.

The second workshop, which will be held before this June, will involve the setting up of an entry-level archiving system at the BBS facility. This will provide the participants with hands-on experience on the assembly procedures of such a system as well as performing digitisation of conventional archived content.



Participants of the first workshop on *Digitalising of Audiovisual Archives* at the BBS facility in Thimpu, Bhutan, in November last year.



The Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU) is a non-profit, non-government association of broadcasting organisations. It was set up in 1964 to facilitate the development of broadcasting in the Asia-Pacific, and to organise co-operative activities among its members. It now has over 200 members.

*The Asia-Pacific Broadcasting Union (ABU) alternates with the Satellite Users Interference Reduction Group (SUIRG) and the IABM to appear in every other issue of APB, highlighting various association news to the industry.*