THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Reaching out to victims

pledges \$40M; toll nears 100,000



clears path for relatives to immigrate

MORE COVERAGE Father and son begin their quest.

Reclusive

tribes may be no more

as tired workers collect the dead

THE GLOBE AND MAIL December 30, 2004

III BROADCAST

Ethnic media blooms in wake of tsunamis



MARY LYNN YOUNG B.C. VIEW

he growing strength of Vancouver's ethnic media is evident this week in the swift, successful fundraising for victims of the tsunamis in

Ethnic media is blossoming in North America, A U.S. research institute announced this summer that mainstream media audiences are relatively "static" or in decline and that the only rays of hope are in on-line, alternative and ethnic media.

In November, California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger launched a monthly political column for exclusive use by ethnic media. More recently, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission broadened the availability of foreign-language television in Cana-

For the established broadcast players in Vancouver's ethnic media market, increased interest is translating into record profits. Fairchild Media Group, which owns two pay-television networks, reported earnings of \$6.5-million in 2004 compared with \$3.2-million a year earlier for its television holdings, according to figures available from the CRTC. Fairchild CEO Thomas Fung says the Vancouver-based company performed so well in 2004 that he instituted the first bonus, a month's salary, company wide, in December.

Other companies, such as radio station CHMB, also reported reard parnings for 200 ly to tell how Vancouver's upstart Čhannel M, one of the two free, over-the-air multicultural television stations in the country, is doing. Vancouver also features two Chinese language daily newspa-

pers.
While Toronto lays claim to a larger number of Asian and South Asian residents than Vancouver, the proportion of these groups is higher in the greater Vancouver area, creating a large concentration of specific ethnicities.

James Ho, who owns CHMB and is a part owner of Channel M, be-lieves that the large proportion of Asian Canadians in the Vancouver area has created a competitive ethnic media market, which has forced local players to grow their businesses smartly.

He says there has been growing interest by national advertisers, such as BMW and Telus Corp., in ethnic listeners and viewers because they are desirable target au-

For Mr. Fung, who was voted one of the most powerful individuals in Canada by Time magazine and one

of the 50 powerbrokers in B.C. by a local magazine in December, interest in ethnic media has translated into more aggressive actions. He says that during the past three years, five major media groups-one American, one from Hong Kong and three Canadian - have approached him to buy 51 per cent of his media holdings.

A few of them, were accompanied by venture capitalists prepared to write a cheque, telling him to "name a figure." His response to each offer was to contact him 10 years from now when he plans to retire.

It isn't surprising that outsiders coveted Fairchild's media holdings, nor that they thought the group might be for sale. Fairchild has a dual - and some might say not seemingly congruent - focus, with the bulk of its revenue originating from the company's property de-velopment and retail arms, not the

media group. Fairchild's property and retail di-vision includes the Aberdeen Centre shopping mall in Richmond, B.C., which features the first North American franchise of Japan's popular \$2 store, Daiso. Mr. Fung's next plan is to launch a business-to-business Internet site in January.

For the established broadcast players in Vancouver's ethnic media market, increased interest is translating into record profits.

This site will make the retail products on sale at his mall, which largely originate from Asian manufacturers, available to wholesalers and other retailers across North America.

Given that Mr. Fung handpicks many of the products available in the mall, down to the menu items in his restaurant, he believes that he can source quality products, eliminating the traditional importing agent and pass on lower prices to other businesses.

Perhaps Mr. Fung is sanguine about his media holdings and the clear interest in ethnic media, so he can afford to divert his attention. He also isn't particularly concerned by the recent CRTC decision to allow other foreign players into the Canadian marketplace, which could directly affect his paytelevision networks.

Then again, early televisions stations were a licence to print money. Mr. Fung just could be part of the latest group of entrepreneurs hoping that history repeats itself.

Mary Lynn Young, Ph.D, is an assistant professor at the University of British Columbia's School of mlyoung@interchange.ubc.ca