

2004 will be defined by numbers: 125,000 people killed by the tsunami and £1.1 billion of aid promised by governments and the World Bank.

However, while the first figure will go up, the second figure is almost certain to go down.

Governments have a history of promising large sums, but cutting what they give once the media spotlight has moved on - and this is where the press let us down.

It has swarmed to the disaster-hit areas, desperate for news in the fallow period between Christmas and New Year. Aid workers, government officers and military chiefs are so besieged by the media pack baying for another sound bite that it must be difficult to find time to do any work.

But they are stuck: fail to satisfy the pack and maybe their area will lose out on coverage and aid.

The tsunami fills the media now and rightly so, but where will it feature in a year's time? Will the news armies that have descended on South-East Asia put the same resources in checking that governments keep their promises and on the long-term aid the devastated areas are receiving?

They should. We forget that the media is a business and it benefits from disaster. In the years to come it should repay its debt.

More figures in the weekend's headlines: the UK has one of the highest crime rates among industrialised nations, according to researchers Norman Dennis and George Erdos. Not so, say other criminologists. It depends on how crimes are counted.

The Home Office thinks Dennis and Erdos are wrong too: "Your chance of being a victim is now at its lowest level for more than 20 years - about the same as it was in 1981".

I was 16 in 1981 and lived less than ten miles from where I do now. I don't remember any crime - at all. Yet last year a gang of drunken men jumped my elderly neighbour's car as she drove home mid-evening. Another neighbour had his garage raided and there was an attempt to break into my home.

Yet 1981 was no idyllic period. I was living in a quiet market town. Three years later I moved to Salford, then the arse end of Manchester and found barbed wire on top of the GP's surgery and advice not to answer if someone asked me the time: I'd be beaten up for my southern accent.

People don't want a return to the crime levels of 1981, but to the safety of the 1960s or before and Dennis and Erdos recognise this. They found that there are now five burglaries for every one in 1964 and no less than 30 robberies.

Criminologists will say that we now record more crime - and maybe we do to get the insurance money, but we also overlook other incidents. If someone had asked me if I had experienced crime in the last year, my immediate answer would be "No" despite the burglary attempt and three lots of scratches to the car with no responsibility claimed. My reason - that's no longer crime - that's life.