

# **REPORT BY THE INDIAN PROGRAMME ADVISORY COMMITTEE 2007-2009**

## **CONTENT**

### **Section 1:**

Introduction	Page 2
- Background	
- The Committee's Work	

### **Section 2:**

Range and Quality of Broadcast Programmes and IPAC's Recommendations	Page 3
- Current Affairs and Info-Educational Programmes	
- Dramas	
- Infotainment, Variety and Cultural Programmes	
- Children and Youth Programmes	
- News	
- Radio Programmes	
- Sponsored Programmes and Advertisements	

### **Section 3:**

Conclusion	Page 8
------------	--------

### **Annex A:**

Committee Members	Page 9
-------------------	--------

### **Annex B:**

Broadcasters' responses to IPAC's feedback and recommendations	Page 11
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## **SECTION 1 : INTRODUCTION**

### **Background**

1 The Indian Programme Advisory Committee (IPAC) was set up in November 1994 to evaluate the quality, content and range of Indian Television and Radio programmes and their impact on the Indian community in Singapore. The Committee also makes recommendations to enhance the broadcasters' role to entertain, inform and educate the public.

2 The current committee was appointed by the Minister for Information, Communication and the Arts (MICA) for a two-year term with effect from May 2007. There are 17 members in the Committee which is chaired by Ms Indranee Rajah, Director, Drew & Napier and Member of Parliament for Tanjong Pagar GRC. (Please refer to *Annex A* for the list of IPAC members). This report by the Committee covers its term from the period May 2007 to April 2009.

### **The Committee's Work**

3 The Committee undertook the following during its current term:

- Reviewed and gave feedback on the quality and range of programmes on the Indian radio station and television channels including those available on the Subscription TV platforms.
- Provided recommendations on how the quality of Indian programmes can be improved.
- Reviewed and provided feedback on the validity of public complaints MDA received on programmes and advertisements.
- Advised the Media Development Authority (MDA) in its drawing up of content guidelines for television and radio programmes.

4 The Committee held a total of eight meetings during its term. During these meetings, the Committee also took the opportunity to meet with the programming staff of the local free-to-air broadcasters, Vasantham and Oli to gain a better understanding of the programming challenges faced by the broadcasters while they strive to entertain and educate the community. The broadcasters have benefited from this exchange of views and have taken on board some of the suggestions made by the Committee.

5 In addition to the regular face-to-face meetings held, IPAC's views on programming standards and the Indian community's views were also sought through e-mail consultations which allowed the Committee to offer timely feedback to MDA on various issues. Beyond specific issues, the Committee also provided feedback on content guidelines concerning advertisements on TV and radio.

## **SECTION 2 : RANGE AND QUALITY OF BROADCAST PROGRAMMES AND IPAC'S RECOMMENDATIONS**

6 Overall, the IPAC noted that with more Subscription TV services, the Indian community now has a wider range of media sources than before. At the same time, the Committee was also pleased with the efforts by the two broadcasters, Vasantham and Oli, to produce innovative and quality local programmes to engage audiences. The Committee noted that entertainment and drama programmes are the most popular genres among locally produced programmes on Vasantham, while the youth time belt on Oli enjoys a high listenership on the station.

7 The IPAC has observed the developments of Indian programmes in terms of range and quality, both on TV and Radio. Throughout their term, members made several recommendations and raised concerns on selected programmes and genres. While broadcasters have taken note of the feedback given and have also followed up on some of the suggestions made, others raised by the Committee remain areas which broadcasters could improve upon. The following are the key recommendations made by the IPAC.

### Language

8 In its observation of locally produced programmes, the Committee stressed the importance of ensuring that there is proper usage of the Tamil language on Vasantham and Oli. Whilst the Committee recognised that colloquial words and English may seem attractive to use in television and radio programmes in order to attract younger audiences, it noted that children and youth tend to consider the language used by Oli's deejays and Vasantham's newsreaders and presenters as the benchmark for the proper use of Tamil. Being an Indian channel, usage of English words in Vasantham's programmes should also be kept to a minimum. Therefore, the Committee advised the broadcasters to continuously take steps to improve the language standards in their programmes and minimise the use of colloquialism and English in local programmes.

9 The IPAC observed that variety programmes on Vasantham such as "*Vasantham Star*", had many instances during which the judges spoke in English. The Committee also expressed its reservations on some programme titles on Oli such as "*Kelu Machi Kelu* (Listen Fellow Listen)" on Oli, a song dedication programme targeted at the youths and "*Dingri Dingale Neram*", the 2pm to 6pm time-belt on Oli. The IPAC felt that terms such as "Machi" that may be popular in certain parts of India should not be encouraged here as it was a colloquial term with negative connotations. The phrase "Dingri Dingale" does not consist of Tamil words and therefore meaning of the phrase is dubious. The Committee was of view that Oli should not be legitimizing such language by using it in their programme titles. The IPAC was also of the view that while using colloquial words in moderation is acceptable, broadcasters should refrain from using words with negative connotations in their programme titles.

10 The Committee stressed that the proper use of the Tamil language should be set as a standard in local productions, especially for News and Current Affairs programmes.

### Diversifying programming mix to attract all communities and age groups

11 The Committee, through its dialogue with members of the public received feedback that Vasantham's programmes tend to be youth-oriented and were not mindful of the expatriate and foreign worker communities. The IPAC reiterated that broadcasters should

have more programmes that cater to the various age groups and the diverse interests of the different Indian communities.

12 Vasantham's drama series "*Dreams*" was commended for encompassing various topics that the different communities could relate to. Programmes such as "*Samaithal Mattum Pothuma*", which featured expatriate couples' gastronomic preferences and "*Vidiya Vidiya Deepavali*", the 2008 Deepavali Countdown Show which had segments that interested both the Indian foreign workers and local Indian community were lauded too.

13 The IPAC also suggested that Vasantham include more programmes that appeal to senior citizens and adolescents aged between 9 and 14. In addition, broadcasters could consider other genres of programmes that enrich the youth academically and artistically rather than relying on song and dance programmes to attract viewers.

14 The IPAC also welcomed Vasantham's initiative to bring back veteran artistes with whom the channel can interest the older generation of viewers with. "*Vidiya Vidiya Deepavali*" and "*Niabagam Varuthe*" (a variety programme that featured mature artistes) were cited as programmes that would appeal to mature audiences.

#### Launch of Vasantham as a full channel

15 The Committee, during its dialogue sessions with Vasantham recognised the programming constraints the channel faced with its limited transmission hours, making it difficult to compete effectively with its increasing competition from overseas Tamil channels. The Committee therefore welcomed the launch of Vasantham as a full channel. Members were of view that Vasantham should leverage on its strength of producing quality programmes with a local flavour that viewers can relate to and cut back on the acquired programming, as focusing on the latter would then make it no different from the slew of Indian cable channels already available. In particular, the Committee observed that Vasantham has quality children's programmes and info-educational programmes which Indian cable channels lack, and should therefore promote these and use these as means to stand out from its competitors.

16 Besides programming ideas, the Committee was also forthcoming with marketing and operational suggestions and assisted in giving Vasantham a better notion of what viewers were expecting of the full channel. The IPAC was heartened to note that Vasantham has been receptive to the ideas put forth by the Committee and looks forward to future dialogues and exchange of ideas.

17 The Committee was pleased to note that Vasantham has been able to keep up to the expectations of the viewers with its programme line-up since its launch as a full channel and looks forward to more quality programmes on the channel.

#### **Current Affairs and Info-educational programmes**

18 The IPAC observed that info-educational programmes on Oli were well received and have a loyal following. Oli's "*Pesalam Vanga*" which is aired from 3pm to 4pm on Thursdays, discusses social issues affecting the community. Members commended the programme for being informative and for engaging the local Indian community with meaningful topics such as life-long learning and cancer awareness. "*Velicham*", the ten-minute current affairs programme aired on Oli on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays was also commended for engaging listeners with its discussion of relevant and timely issues. The IPAC requested for such programmes to be aired daily if resources permit.

19 The Committee was pleased with info-educational programmes such as *"Ethioli"* and *"Naam"* shown on Vasantham as the programmes provide a well-researched round up of the major events that happened during the week. Members suggested that Vasantham consider extending the duration of the above-mentioned programmes beyond half an hour as this would allow Vasantham to cover more issues in a greater depth.

20 The Committee also applauded Vasantham for offering four "live" programmes a week with "call-in" segments - *"Arangathil Indru"*, *"Udallum Ullamum"*, *"Chutti's Club"* and *"Hello Vasantham"*- and noted that such programmes require additional manpower and expertise compared to regular scheduled programmes. These newly introduced programmes and *"Ithu Namma Kathai"* on Vasantham were commended for continuing the legacy of quality info-educational programmes that Vasantham has been producing. Members were of the opinion that producing more "live" programmes with elements of interactivity is a step in the right direction in drawing and retaining viewership. The IPAC however, suggested for Vasantham to consider allowing viewers to pose questions using other means such as SMSes and e-mails, rather than limiting it to phone calls. Members were of the view that it will be easier for the programme producers to screen SMSes and e-mails for the better questions to feature in the programmes. Vasantham can also post some of the frequently asked questions on the topic covered in the programmes on their website.

### **Dramas**

21 The Committee expressed appreciation over the production quality of local Tamil dramas which has improved tremendously over the past years.

22 The Committee lauded Vasantham's move to explore producing long form dramas such as *"Dreams"* and *"Bayam"* to tap on appointment viewing that Vasantham previously did not enjoy.

23 The Committee encouraged Vasantham to pursue more joint collaborations with foreign companies and talents to improve the quality and variety of programmes produced. The locally produced drama series *"Manam 2"* that featured people living with mental illnesses was illustrative of a successful collaboration. The programme's quality performances by local and foreign artistes coupled with riveting plots made the programme an award winning drama series and a popular favourite among the viewers. The drama series *"Kaduvull.com"*, a joint effort by artistes from India and Singapore received good reviews amongst viewers as well.

### **Infotainment, Variety and Cultural programmes**

24 IPAC observed that although Oli had been involved in several cultural projects undertaken by the Indian community, the station seemed to lack cultural programmes other than the drama series *"Mahabharatam"*. Members also opined that some of the capsule programmes on poem recitals needed an overhaul and a refreshing outlook.

25 Members were of the opinion that Vasantham has aired a range of variety programmes such as *"Oli Oli"*, *"Ithu Enna Pattu"* and *"Hello Vasantham"* since the launch. Infotainment programmes such as *"Vaseegara Payanam"*, a travelogue programme, was also commended as it brought viewers to beautiful places in India and featured the different lifestyles people lead. The Committee recommended that the series return for a second season which could feature other countries. *"Mugavarigal"* (Addresses), an info-educational programme which reflected the cultures and traditions of the various Indian communities was also commended.

26 The Committee was pleased with the programme “Navarasa” as it presented classical dance, poem recital and music in an interesting manner. Members felt that these kinds of cultural programmes can help bring about greater awareness and interest in classical music, dance and literature among the youth and children.

27 Members added that the broadcasters could occasionally produce programmes that reflect the history and contributions of Indian pioneers who have contributed to Singapore’s success as viewers, especially the younger ones, might not be familiar with these personalities.

### **Children and Youth Programmes**

28 With the launch of the full channel, the IPAC was pleased to note that Vasantham has been receptive to calls for more programmes that engage the youth and has produced programmes such as “*Dhil Dare Devils*” and “*Yaar Antha Star*”. This genre also saw the return of successful variety programmes such as “*Planet Galatta*” and “*Dhool*” in their second and third seasons respectively. Whilst the Committee was pleased with “*Dhil Dare Devils*”, it encouraged Vasantham to consider other types of reality programmes other than the traditional adventure based ones.

29 The IPAC noted that new programmes such as “*Iyantira*” displayed good production standards but commented that the programme could focus more on the historical elements. Members also lauded Vasantham’s bold move to get children involved in “live” programmes such as “*Chutti’s Club*” and was pleased that the channel was experimenting with different programme models such as allowing children to host a programme targeted at children.

30 Vasantham was also encouraged to produce educational programmes in the likes of “*Vasantham Challenge*”, a quiz show that tested children on science, arts and general knowledge. At the same time, the Committee opined that Vasantham could emulate Channel 5 in producing an unconventional debating programme like “*The Arena*” to appeal to the young. Members also suggested holding a competition for project videos of primary and secondary school students where the winning works are then featured in a programme.

### **News**

31 The IPAC was pleased that the News programme on Vasantham remains the most watched programme on the channel. However, members felt that more training could be given to Vasantham’s newscasters as they have observed instances in which English words such as names of politicians and sports personalities were mispronounced by the news presenters. Members also noted occasions in which Hindi film titles were mispronounced. Members opined that since students are encouraged to watch the News, they may pick up the wrong pronunciation from the newscasters as News programmes are normally perceived as the benchmark for the proper use of the language. The Committee noted that the department is looking into the feasibility of providing news texts below the screen during the News programmes and looks forward to its implementation.

32 The Committee observed that while news programmes on Oli are commendable, the news-in-briefs, which are the summarized form of the news programmes, have much room for improvement in comparison. They contain many mispronounced words and sentences which are delivered with wrong intonations. It is also noted that while the news programmes are presented by the Oli’s news team, the news-in-briefs on Oli are presented by the deejays. Members recommended that Oli deejays be adequately trained by the Oli news team since news reading requires a different set of skills from those required in presenting programmes. Oli is also encouraged to refrain from entrusting new deejays with the reading of news-in-briefs until they have been given sufficient training.

## Radio Programmes

33 Members lauded Oli on its morning programme belt as it is inspiring and refreshing and filled with useful and motivational tips. Capsules within the morning belt such as *“Indraikku Andru”* (Today in History) and *“Ungalluku Theriyuma”* (Did you know?) were also appreciated by the Committee as valuable informational segments.

34 The Committee was also pleased with Oli’s efforts in supporting various cultural and social initiatives through on-air and off-air participation. Members commended Oli for supporting events such as Tamil Language Festival during which Oli had a 25-episode weekly drama to promote the use of the Tamil language. Members were also pleased with Oli’s efforts in helping to raise awareness of the festival through its airing of various programmes over and above the advertising spots taken up by the festival’s organizers.

35 The Committee however, was of opinion that more could be done to diversify the range of programmes available to the listeners. The IPAC recommended that Oli consider producing short magazine style programmes for different segments of the community such as women, youth, children and elderly. These programmes could comprise a pre-recorded segment followed by “live” calls on the issue discussed.

36 The IPAC recognised the value of having a youth time belt from 6pm to 10pm but noted that the programmes so far tend to focus on topics of entertainment. The Committee suggested that Oli include a wider array of programmes with enriching and educational messages in addition to the entertainment programmes. Members added that Oli could host events such as school debates, competitions and collaborative projects in the youth time belt. Talkshows, bi-weekly forums and a ten-minute magazine style programme were some of the suggestions made by the IPAC for this timeslot.

37 Members observed that the deejays during the youth time belt often engaged in idle chat on trivial matters and that the time belt had too many telephone interaction programmes. Members suggested that pre-recorded interviews with experts addressing current, social issues the youths face be included in the programme line-up. Members acknowledged that Oli did cover social issues from 9pm to 10pm but observed that the discussions lacked opinions from experts from the respective fields.

38 Members also highlighted that the youth time belt could include segments for young working adults as they face a different set of issues as compared to school-going youths. Subjects such as job opportunities, higher learning, discussions on online/ blog/ facebook issues, marital issues and relationships could be covered in these segments. The IPAC proposed that Oli move away from traditional talk show formats and present these matters through dramas and site visit programmes to make the programmes more interesting.

39 The Committee requested for Oli to produce more programmes like *“Campus Broadcast”* where students from the tertiary institutions are encouraged to speak on various topics such as “Youth and Volunteerism”, “Youth and the Tamil language” and “Youth and the Great Singapore Sale” from the location of their schools. The Committee also expressed appreciation for programmes such as *“College of Radio”* on Oli which was a series of workshops where listeners could learn the basics of radio programming. Members opined that such programmes not only engaged the youth but were also useful in developing talent.

40 The Committee suggested that more programmes be produced for children as there is currently only one “live” children’s programme *“Chellame Chellam”* broadcast on

Saturdays from 2pm to 3pm. Members commented that children hosting the above mentioned programme would make it more appealing to the target audience.

41 The IPAC was pleased to note that Oli has dedicated its 2pm to 4pm weekday slots to cater to the senior citizens. IPAC advised that Oli introduce more pre-recorded segments featuring experts of the topic discussed rather than having presenters share their experiences which then reduces the credibility of the programme.

42 The Committee appreciated Oli's efforts in providing programmes for the elderly by re-playing radio plays like the Hindu epic "*Mahabharatam*". However, as such plays were recorded many years ago, the IPAC also urged Oli to consider offering new and more of such similar programmes. Oli could emulate Vasantham in bringing back older deejays to present some of these programmes. The IPAC was of opinion that the older deejays still have a good following among the more mature audiences who would tune in to listen to their favourite deejays.

43 Oli was also requested to include more information capsules on social issues that would be beneficial to the lower income groups. The Committee was of opinion that the media can play its part in simplifying and conveying to this demographic, complex concepts such as proposed changes to CPF contributions by producing capsules providing the information in a clear and straightforward manner that is easily understood by listeners.

### **Sponsored programmes and Advertisements**

44 The Committee observed that Oli has numerous, similar sounding advertisements and sponsored programmes which seem to promote various brands of health products. It was observed that the sponsor messages within the programmes are normally a few minutes long. The IPAC suggested for Oli to vary the delivery of such sponsored messages so that they do not sound identical. In addition, members also suggested that Oli combine a few of these three-minute sponsor messages into a ten-minute programme and free up air time for other programmes.

45 In order not to mislead listeners, broadcasters were also encouraged to include lead-ins that clearly indicate that the programmes that follow are paid presentations that are advertorial in nature.

46 Members commented that broadcasters should be mindful of the kind of advertisements they schedule in relation to the genre of programme. The Committee observed instances in which an advertisement for a night club 'Ace at CHIJMES' was played in between Oli's children's programme "*Chellame Chellam*".

### **SECTION 3 : CONCLUSION**

47 In this report, the IPAC has made specific recommendations on improving the range and quality of Indian programmes available on television and radio. The Committee recognised that the local broadcasters face immense competition from the various forms of media available and therefore urged broadcasters to air unique, quality programming in order to anchor and retain audience.

48 The Committee encouraged broadcasters to strike a balance between fulfilling their roles as free-to-air broadcasters providing programmes that promote the development of the community as well as ensuring that the programmes are commercially viable.



## **COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

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## BROADCASTERS' RESPONSES TO IPAC'S FEEDBACK AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are the responses of the broadcasters to the IPAC's feedback and recommendations given in this report.

### Oli

Oli has noted the Committee's concerns on the use of colloquial language in its programme titles and has ceased using such words in their programme titles.

2 Oli indicated that it has recently included a segment that promotes cultural activities in Oli's Diary of Events, "*Enna Engey*" and also during the 9pm-10pm programme slot.

3 To improve the deejays' news reading skills, Oli's deejays are trained by MediaCorp Radio's Tamil newsroom team. All deejays undergo at least two months of training and have to pass a reading test before they are allowed to read news on-air.

4 Oli has noted the IPAC's comments on diversifying the range of programmes on Oli and members' recommendation to consider producing short magazine style programmes for different segments of the community and will consider the suggestions for their future programmes.

5 With regard to IPAC's suggestion for Oli to include a wider array of programmes with enriching and educational messages in their youth time belt, Oli responded that the youth timebelt from 6pm to 10pm is gaining popularity amongst the young Indian listeners. Oli shared that over the past year, Oli has dedicated more than 50 hours to enrich and educate the youth with a wide range of content, including :

- (a) showcasing youth who are achievers (eg: youth TT Dhavamani who was given funding to produce a full length feature film);
- (b) encouraging youth to participate in social and cultural activities (eg: discussion topic on 'youth and volunteerism');
- (c) highlighting programmes which allow youth to better themselves (eg: low-cost tuition classes for 'A' level students).

6 Oli added that they are currently recording and broadcasting dramas written and produced by Junior College students to promote the use of the Tamil language as well as to encourage creativity amongst Indian youth. Oli will also explore working with various youth organisations for future programmes.

7 Oli has noted the IPAC's comments on including segments for young working adults in their youth time belt and members' proposal to move away from traditional talk show formats as well as the suggestion to offer more programmes such as "*Mahabharatam*" for the elderly and to bring back older deejays to present some of these programmes.

8 In response to the Committee's request for Oli to produce more programmes like "*Campus Broadcast*" and "*College of Radio*", Oli commented that it continues to engage Indian youths through a variety of programmes, including "*Campus Broadcast*" which is just one of the programmes. Since "*College of Radio*" is a training programme organised by MediaCorp's subsidiary, The Singapore Media Academy, Oli will convey IPAC's suggestion to them. Oli will also explore IPAC's suggestion to produce more programmes for children and will explore the idea of having children to host the programmes in future.

9 On IPAC's advice to introduce more segments featuring experts in their discussion of topics, Oli said that they occasionally invite experts to their shows but shared that they face the challenge of getting experts who are proficient in the Tamil language. Oli notes the advice of the IPAC and will explore how to share expert opinions of non-Tamil speakers without affecting the credibility of the programme.

10 In response to the request to include more information capsules on social issues that can be easily understood by all listeners especially the lower income groups, Oli said that it continues to work with many organisations to provide timely information to relevant segments of the population. For instance, in view of the current economic downturn, Oli is working with Indian organisations such as Narpani Peravai, Tamils' Representative Council and SINDA to disseminate information to the lower income groups. There is also a weekly programme on Sundays catering specifically to the needs of the lower income groups.

11 With regard to the Committee's suggestions for Oli to vary the delivery of sponsored messages and to combine a few of the smaller sponsor messages into a ten-minute programme and free up air time for other programmes, Oli commented that it will continue to balance its public service obligations and commercial considerations to package sponsored programmes more creatively and at the same time conform to the sponsorship guidelines.

#### Vasantham

12 Vasantham has indicated that it agrees that the points highlighted by the Committee are of relevance, and the feedback is crucial in helping the channel progress.