

**REPORT OF THE INDIAN PROGRAMMES
ADVISORY COMMITTEE (IPAC)**

2009/2011

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(I) INTRODUCTION

a) Background

1 The Indian Programmes 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 broadcasters' role of entertaining, informing and educating listeners and viewers.

2 This report by IPAC covers the period May 2009 to April 2011. The current committee was appointed by the Minister for Information, Communications and the Arts (MICA) for a two-year term, which took effect from 1 May 2011. The Committee has 17 members and currently chaired by Ms Indranee Rajah, Director, Drew & Napier and Member of Parliament for Tanjong Pagar GRC. The list of IPAC members can be found in **Annex A**.

b) The Committee's Work

3 The Committee undertook the following during its current term:

- a. Reviewed and gave feedback on the quality and range of programmes on Tamil radio station Oli and television channels, including those available on subscription TV platforms;
- b. Provided recommendations on how the quality of Indian programmes can be improved;
- c. Reviewed and provided feedback on media content matters, including those arising from public complaints; and
- d. Provided support and advice to the Media Development Authority (MDA) with regard to the formulation of content guidelines, gathering of programme feedback and public education.

4 The Committee had nine meetings between May 2009 and April 2011. During this period, the Committee continued its practice of holding dialogues with the programming staff

of MediaCorp's Indian TV channel, Vasantham, and radio station, Oli, to be updated on their programming plans as well as challenges faced by the industry.

5 In addition to regular meetings, IPAC also provided timely feedback to MDA on programming and advertising issues via e-mail whenever the need arose.

6 Beyond providing its views on specific content issues, the Committee was also consulted on various matters, including revisions of MDA's content codes, other regulatory guidelines, and recommendations for new TV programmes.

(II) SUMMARY OF KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

7 The following is an overview of the key recommendations made by IPAC, based on its observations during the course of its term.

Provision of Tamil subtitles for news programmes on Vasantham

8 The Committee suggested that Vasantham provide Tamil subtitles for news programmes, in the same manner that same-language subtitles are available for news bulletins on MediaCorp channels in other languages. This would benefit the hearing-impaired, the elderly and those wishing to improve their Tamil-language skills.

Greater variety of entertainment programmes needed on Vasantham

9 The Committee was of the view that the entertainment programmes on Vasantham were similar to each other as they mostly contained skit and song segments, which were repetitive. The Committee opined that Vasantham's strategy on entertainment programmes required a review, suggesting that the channel offer a greater variety of entertainment programmes. This was especially important as the audience had many options, with the wide availability of pay TV channels from India.

Exploring more genres of programmes for children, youth and the elderly

10 The Committee was generally pleased with Vasantham's efforts to offer content targeting children, youth and the elderly. However, the Committee was of the view that the topics explored in these programmes could be further diversified.

11 Members hoped to encourage the channel to focus more on educational and general knowledge programmes for children and youth instead of just featuring programmes on song

and dance. The Committee also suggested that the channel consider airing programmes which encourage the young to use Tamil.

12 With regard to programmes for the elderly, IPAC urged the channel to come up with info-educational programmes that could provide seniors with useful health and lifestyle information, as well as programmes featuring stories of people from this age group, which could inspire viewers to live more fruitful, fulfilling lives.

Oli to revamp structure and content of programmes

13 On the whole, IPAC viewed Oli programmes as of good quality, especially the news and current affairs programmes. However, the Committee felt that the station needed a revamp in order to review the effectiveness of its content and structure of its programmes, so as to be more relevant to listeners.

14 While IPAC acknowledged and lauded the fact that Oli attempts to reach out to its youth audience, the Committee also urged Oli to be more mindful of its other audience segments and urged the broadcaster to offer the other segments fresh content.

(III) Observations and Recommendations on the Range and Quality of Tamil Programmes

15 Overall, the Committee was pleased with the efforts by Vasantham and Oli to offer the Indian community a wide variety of locally produced programmes. The Committee was also heartened to note that the broadcasters were aware of their roles as community broadcasters and sought to produce quality programmes.

16 As highlighted in the previous IPAC report released in 2009, the Committee also noted this time round that locally produced dramas remained the most popular genre of on Vasantham while the youth timebelt on Oli enjoys the highest level of listenership. The following are IPAC's key recommendations for Indian programmes:

News

17 The Committee was pleased with Vasantham's move to repeat the 8.30pm news bulletin at 11.30pm from Mondays to Thursdays, and at 12 midnight from Fridays to Sundays, as they felt it was useful for Indian viewers who return home late and are unable to catch the earlier broadcast.

18 Members commended the segment *Thinam Oru Sol* in the news bulletin, which offers a Tamil translation of a different English word/phrase each day, as they found it beneficial for students who want to improve their Tamil vocabulary. On this note, the Committee looks forward to the time when Vasantham can provide Tamil subtitles in its news programmes, in the same manner that same-language subtitles are available for news bulletins on MediaCorp channels in other languages. This would benefit the hearing-impaired, the elderly and those wishing to improve their Tamil-language skills.

Current Affairs, Cultural and Info-Educational Programmes

19 Generally, the Committee was pleased with Vasantham's current affairs, cultural and info-educational programmes, which members found to be of a good standard. *Ethirola*, the channel's regular current affairs programme, was commended for giving timely insights on issues of interest to the Indian community. They include the SINDA-ITE Roadshow, which aimed to promote higher education and skills upgrading among ITE students, and the profile of a new citizen, which featured a scientist from India who regards Singapore as her home. It was suggested that, in order to give the programme a younger feel, Vasantham could consider involving student reporters from the junior colleges or polytechnics to file reports for the programme. This could make the programme more appealing to younger viewers and possibly encourage them to tune in to these programmes.

20 The Committee was of the view that the info-educational programme *Naam* was well-researched, made good observations on the community and covered issues that would be of interest to them, including features on Kalaa Utsavam, a series of performances organized by the Esplanade to celebrate the Indian arts, and Narpani's Family Day, which was organized by the Narpani Pearavai (The People's Association Indian Activity Executive Committees Council). The Committee was also supportive of Vasantham's info-educational programme, *Taalam* (Indian Beat), which featured a range of community events profiling various Indian ethnic groups. Members found its format of presenting content in both Tamil and English to be a refreshing change, and one which could help to better integrate the various Indian ethnic communities here.

21 Cultural programmes such as *Vasantham Sangeetha Vizha* and *Salangai Oli* were also applauded by the Committee for filling in a gap in coverage of classical music and dance scene in the mainstream media, and for seeking to boost interest in classical Indian arts among the youth. *Vasantham Sangeetha Vizha*, which featured maestros of classical dance and music from India, was also commended as the maestros gave vocal and dance

training for local youth interested in the respective classical art forms. Similarly, members were pleased with the new format of *Salangai Oli*, which featured a classical Indian dance competition.

22 IPAC was also pleased with *Aaniver*, an info-educational series about Indian influences in different countries and its evidence in architecture. The Committee felt that the series was well-researched and produced. As such programmes are not being produced by Indian cable channels, IPAC suggested that Vasantham take the opportunity to produce more of such programmes. The Committee also suggested that *Aaniver* be dubbed in English and shown on Channel NewsAsia, as it could then reach out to non-Indians as well as Indians in Singapore and the region who may be interested in such programmes.

23 The Committee lauded travelogue programmes such as *Saalaram*, a series which covered the culture, history, festivals and cuisines of Mediterranean cities, and *Oor Kuruvi*, a programme that featured various cities in India and their unique features, history and culture. The Committee found such programmes to be rich in information, yet entertaining and light-hearted.

Dramas

24 The Committee was of the view that the quality of locally produced dramas has improved, both technically and in terms of their scripts.

25 IPAC observed that long-form dramas such as *Sollamaley*, *Nijangal* and *Vettai*, which aimed to garner a faithful following and tap on appointment viewing, had proven to be successful, as ratings for these series were high and sustained throughout their runs. The dramas were also commended for their compelling storylines and quality acting. Compared to foreign long-form dramas shown on pay TV channels, the Committee found that the local ones produced by Vasantham contained less melodrama. In addition, the social issues explored in the local dramas were more relevant to the Indian community here. On a related note, the Committee advised Vasantham to avoid over-indulging in melodramatic sequences which do not contribute to the storyline. It cited the example of an episode of *Vaanavil*, which featured prolonged scenes of death processions which viewers may feel uncomfortable watching.

26 IPAC commended Vasantham for its drama *Vyjayanthi*, a period drama revolving around the life of a Chinese woman adopted by an Indian family during the Japanese

occupation of Singapore, as such incidents were unique to Singapore's history. The programme was also useful in enlightening the younger generation on our past and culture.

Variety and Entertainment Programmes

27 While the Committee was appreciative of the broadcaster's attempts to introduce new programme formats, they found programmes such as *Vasantham Café*, which contains segments featuring singing, dancing and comedic skits; *Enna Nadakuthu*, a programme produced with a studio audience which contains interviews, song and dance performances and games played with the studio audiences; and *Jamai Express*, a comedy which offers spoofs of other popular TV programmes and movies, lacking clear programming objectives. They were also similar, as they featured the same type of songs and skit segments. The Committee questioned the target audiences for such shows and noted that the programmes fell short of their objective, especially when they had comedic elements.

28 As for talk shows such as *Endrendrum Punnagai*, IPAC commented that viewers tend to compare such locally produced programmes to their foreign counterparts available on Indian pay TV channels, which appear to be better researched. Similarly, the Committee was of the view that variety programmes which featured singing competitions, such as *Yaar Antha Star*, tend to pale in comparison with pay TV programmes such as *Junior Super Singer* and *Super Singer* on Vijay TV, which were more interactive and featured voice trainers who trained the contestants. The Committee was therefore of the view that Vasantham should do more research and put more resources to producing entertainment and variety programmes, as they face stiff competition within the genre from pay TV channels.

29 IPAC lauded Vasantham's efforts in working with broadcasters from Malaysia to jointly produce variety programmes such as the annual *Deepavali Countdown Show* and *Attam 100 Vagai vs Dhool*, a dance competition. Members were of the view that such programmes would not only create opportunities for the broadcaster to improve its production capabilities, but also help to build Vasantham's brand name beyond local shores.

30 With regard to 2010's *Pradhana Vizha*, an award show which honors local Vasantham artistes, the Committee praised Vasantham for featuring Indian cultural arts into the show via classical music and bhangra performances.

Programmes for Children and Youth

31 While IPAC noted that Vasantham airs children's programmes such as *My Dear Kudumbam* and *Chutti's Club*, it opined that more should be done to enhance the quality and quantity of children's programmes. The Committee also advised Vasantham to feature more educational programmes, rather than those with entertainment value. The Committee also suggested that the channel consider programmes which encourage the use of Tamil among the young by making the learning of the language fun and interesting.

32 The Committee commended *NC Pathinaaru*, a docu-drama targeted at the youth and dealing with issues they face, such as alcoholism and boy-girl relationships. Members opined that the programme's format, which included interviews with other young people and dramatised sequences, would appeal to the target audience. It urged Vasantham to continue trying such innovative formats to reach out to this age group.

Programmes for the Elderly

33 The Committee noted Vasantham's attempts to reach out to the elderly by airing Tamil movie classics on Friday nights and introducing variety programmes such as *Vasantham Gold*, which featured veteran singers. However, the Committee felt that more could be done to meet the viewing needs of this age group, such as coming up with programmes which provide the elderly with useful information. This could include info-educational programmes with lifestyle tips, health information and inspiring stories which could encourage the elderly to enjoy their golden years.

Radio Programmes

34 Oli's news bulletins were commended for the consistently good quality of its reporting, and for the speed at which they were able to feature Tamil-speaking interviewees when newsworthy incidents occurred in non-Tamil-speaking countries. These include the 2009 attack on the Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore, for which Oli secured a Tamil-speaking cricket team member to comment on the incident soon after it occurred. With regard to improving the news bulletins, the Committee suggested that Oli consider an adaptation of a segment similar to Vasantham's *Thinam Oru Sol*, which features different Tamil words each day and explains their meaning, as this would help improve listeners' Tamil vocabulary.

35 With regard to the presentation abilities of the station's deejays, the Committee noted that since their feedback in the 2009 report, the deejays had generally improved their language and presentation skills. However, members were still of the opinion that the deejays should not be required to read the news, as they might not possess the skills to do

so. On a related note, the Committee suggested that Oli consider getting Indian expatriates to do segments which Oli had repeatedly attempted to train the younger deejays to do, but were not able to. Members cited the instance of *Thirukkural* segments aired on the station in the past. As *Thirukkural* is composed in a *venba* (classical Tamil poetry) format which has well-defined rules of presentation such as stresses on certain syllables and pauses between words, the deejay presenting such segments would need to have the appropriate pronunciation, intonation and background in such classical Tamil poetry, which the current deejays did not possess.

36 IPAC also commented that the younger deejays tend to be too verbose, share personal information that do not add value to topics discussed, and make personal jokes that the audience is not able to comprehend. The members therefore advised Oli to remind its deejays of the need to conduct themselves properly on air and to conduct more air checks to ensure quality. The Committee also encouraged Oli to balance the proportion of younger deejays with more experienced deejays, so that the latter can coach the former. The Committee also called for an increase in pre-produced segments as compared to live segments which cannot be vetted beforehand, as they opined that the former would enable the deejays to be more mindful of their presentation techniques and do more research prior to going on air. The Committee suggested that the pre-produced segments could include genres such as cultural programmes (eg. *Thirukkural* and classical music), debate programmes which involve schools, educational quiz segments and children's programmes.

37 The Committee commended the station's efforts in complementing the coverage of events and advertisements related to Tamil Language Month in 2010 organized by the Tamil Language Council with its own programming. IPAC also expressed appreciation for Oli's use of music, quizzes and a debate programme to encourage the use of Tamil during that period.

38 With regard to North Indian programmes on Oli, IPAC was of the view that these programmes should contain minimal traffic updates and advertisements, since North Indian programmes are dispersed into shorter segments throughout the day and should therefore have fewer interruptions to sure that the programmes do not appear disjointed.

39 The Committee was of the view that the station required a revamp to review the content and structure of its programmes. The members of the Committee suggested that Oli consider revamping programmes such as *PSLE Workshop*, *Top 10 Countdown* and *Campus Broadcast*, as these programmes have been a constant feature of the station for the last few years and have, as a result, become predictable in both concept and execution.

40 The Committee therefore encouraged Oli to undertake new initiatives to energise the station and suggested that they study their Malaysian competitors such as THR Raaga and Minnal and online radio services such as Aaha, to get some ideas on how the content and format of Oli's programmes can be improved.

(IV) IPAC's Views on Revision of Content Codes and CRC recommendations

41 During its term, IPAC was consulted on various content codes, which MDA reviews on a regular basis. The codes reviewed include the TV Advertising Code, Radio Advertising and Sponsorship Code, Subscription TV Programme Code and the Free-to-Air (FTA) TV Programme Code. The Committee was also consulted on the Censorship Review Committee's (CRC) recommendations, which were made in 2010. Some of the key recommendations made by IPAC are highlighted below.

42 While giving their views on the advertising codes, IPAC said that the infomercial programmes on Oli, though identified as sponsored programmes, do not contain adequate disclaimers which warn the audience of the programmes' nature. The Committee cited the instance of the station's infomercial segments for a forex trading workshop. The segments gave the impression that forex trading was an easy way to make money without informing the audience that it is a risky venture where returns are not guaranteed. Members felt that as some of these deejays have a good rapport with the public and promote and endorse the product in a convincing manner, this could result in listeners being misled. Following the feedback, MDA included a new clause in the Radio Advertising and Sponsorship Code to ensure that sponsored segments and advertisements which involve the investment of money in products or services where returns are not guaranteed include disclaimers and/or warnings on the potential risks involved.

43 IPAC took a hands-on approach in reviewing the FTA TV Programme Code by going through the code's clauses and making recommendations on areas for improvement and how existing clauses could be better phrased for clarity.

44 The Committee also gave their views on CRC recommendations, such the introduction of a new PG13 rating for films, the harmonising of film and TV classification ratings, and the introduction of R21 content on video-on-demand.

(V) Conclusion

45 During its term, IPAC took the opportunity to make several recommendations on how the range and quality of programmes can be improved. While some recommendations have been shared with the broadcasters over the course of the term, some have yet to be conveyed to them, and these have to be considered following the release of this report. As Vasantham and Oli are community broadcasters, IPAC requests that they be mindful of the challenges and needs of the community, and urges them to play an active role in educating and improving the standing of the community.

46 With the rapidly evolving media landscape, IPAC also asks that broadcasters be innovative in the creation and marketing of media content to remain relevant to their audiences.

47 Responses from the broadcasters to the Report can be found in **Annex B.**

Annex A: List of Members**Chairperson:****Ms Indranee Rajah**

Director, Drew & Napier

Member of Parliament, Tanjong Pagar GRC

Vice-Chairperson:**Mr R Rajaram**

Director

Office of Admissions

National University of Singapore

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Annex B: Broadcasters' Responses to IPAC's Feedback and Recommendations

Comments from Vasantham

Vasantham acknowledged the detailed observations and recommendations made by IPAC and will certainly explore incorporating them in the channel's future programme strategies within the available budgets and resources.

Variety series

The variety series in particular: *Enna Nadukuthu*, *Vasantham Café* and *Jamai Express* were conceptualized on the following premise of interactivity, entertainment and humour respectively. These elements created the distinction between the three programmes.

Enna Nadukuthu was an interactive audience-based programme to engage and connect with the viewers through various segments, and involved participation from the Indian community.

Vasantham Café aimed to relive the feel of the *Maalai Mathuram & Oli Oli* days, where it provided entertainment through song and dance, a feature that the viewers appreciate and look forward to.

Jamai Express aimed to inject humour, similar to that of Channel 5's *The Moose*, with the intention of allowing the audience to sit back and look at the lighter side of things.

Comments from Oli

Listenership

Oli is happy that IPAC found Oli's programmes to be of "good quality" and "lauded" the station's initiatives to reach out to a young audience.

Oli would like to highlight that the station's largest audience segment is the 40+ age group, with the youth audience (15-24 years) making up 11% of its total listenership. As such, the youth remains a key target segment for Oli as they represent the future of Oli listeners, but the station currently only reaches out to 61% of the potential listeners. Oli would like to assure IPAC that the station remains focused on its core listeners of those aged 25 years and above, and not just the younger ones.

Young deejays

Oli is also heartened that the IPAC has noticed the improvement in the language and presentation skills of young Oli deejays. Oli notes IPAC's comment that "news not be read by the young Oli deejays". In the longer term, not giving the young deejays the opportunity to read news may result in a shortage of newsreaders. Oli will invest time in training instead of discouraging young deejays from reading the news. With regard to the proportion of experienced deejays versus young deejays; as at June 2011, the number of young deejays with fewer than five years of experience make up about two-fifths of Oli's pool of deejays.

New initiative

With regard to IPAC's proposal that Oli should revamp its programmes, Oli is pleased to inform the Committee that, together with its sister stations, Oli has organized Singapore's first reality radio show, *So You Wanna Be a DJ?*, which attracted a lot of young potential talents.