

PROGRAMME ADVISORY COMMITTEE REPORT

# Committee praises Channel NewsAsia

FOR its extensive coverage of the American presidential elections, and for keeping viewers well abreast of the political situations in Malaysia and Thailand, MediaCorp's Channel NewsAsia was yesterday praised by the Programme Advisory Committee for English Programmes (Pace).

Also given the thumbs up: The channel's "wide variety" of info-educational programmes and documentaries on wide-ranging topics, from travel to technology — plus interviews and discussions with experts.

In its 12th biennial report, Pace noted that CNA has tried "to be opinion leaders instead of merely reporters of facts". For instance, its current affairs programme, *I Say*, sought to offer

the public's views on a topic, and an analysis by the presenter afterwards.

To improve the news channel further, Pace called for more programmes dealing with relevant and current issues, "in the form of hard-nosed interview programmes, forums, magazine programmes, talk shows and documentaries". Pace also wanted more "thought-provoking" discussions.

The report noted that despite CNA's efforts, overall, "the broadcaster was still adopting a conservative and careful approach in its reports and programmes".

The trouble with this, said Pace, was the public perceiving CNA as the "voice of the Government", rendering it less effective in difficult times.

And while some felt CNA's coverage of current affairs and info-educational programmes was sufficient, others felt the programmes lacked the "X-Factor" to attract loyal viewers, noted the report.

In response to Pace's comments on the merging of *Singapore Tonight* and *Singapore Business Tonight*, Media Corp said this was "to create a more focused Singapore half hour" as well as respond to viewers who wanted more coverage of global and regional financial news". Overall, reports on Singapore have not been reduced, the broadcaster assured.

CNA also discusses regional and world issues on *Insight* and *360*, while Singapore issues are discussed

## Some local dramas provided good entertainment

IT PRAISED local dramas such as *Sayang Sayang* — a series about a Peranakan family that offered a "unique perspective of Singapore" rarely seen on mainstream TV — and *Fighting Spiders*, about three boys coming of age in 1960s that took older viewers down memory lane.

Pace also cited programmes shown on MediaCorp Channel 5 that "provided good entertainment to viewers and some were also of educational value". These included *Singapore Idol* and *Prove It!* and acquired series such as *CSI* and *The Amazing Race*.

Said chairman Leo Tan: "You can see the Singapore public appreciates such programmes (like *Fighting Spiders*). It endeared my generation and the younger generation could see what life was like."

But Pace took issue with certain programmes, such as *Fist of Zen* on MTV S.E.A Channel, which were "deemed to be lacking in taste". It also found *S Factor* and *SingTel Grid Girls* shown on Channel 5 to be "degrading to women".

In response, MediaCorp said that *S Factor* was "meant to be an entertaining, light-hearted and tongue-in-cheek reality TV series". The broadcaster said *S Factor* targeted a "more discerning and mature audience who would be able to appreciate the 'raw' unscripted content" of the show.

SingTel, title sponsor for this year's Formula 1 race, said: "*Grid Girls on Tour* is a travel and lifestyle programme produced by MediaCorp, and the ladies act as sporty and fun-loving travel guides at race venues around the world."

Pace recommended more entertainment programmes focused on family values, and which were "intelligent and thought-provoking". MediaCorp responded that *Sayang Sayang* and the upcoming *Polo Boys* drama would promote family values and traditions.

Pace also advised broadcasters to "exercise discretion", noting that certain programmes, such as *Hannah Montana* and *High School Musical*, "imparted the wrong values to its young viewers" as the characters got involved in love relationships at a young age.

MediaCorp said it would "continue to ensure such content, while reflecting the reality of issues that pre-teens are exposed to, are not overly emphasised".

Local programmes such as *Sayang Sayang* were well-liked for their portrayals of unique elements of Singapore life.



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## Radio: Moulding a strong identity

RADIO stations have "continued to strengthen and develop their individual identities", said Pace — highlighting, for example, how MediaCorp's Lush 99.5 FM had reinvented itself by coming up with new programming and picking music that was "reflective" of social changes.

It was also glad to note that content breaches by radio stations from 2007 to 2009 have dropped, and that deejays were making attempts to ensure their language and content were acceptable to general listeners.

Singled out for commendation for their efforts to maintain a "good standard of English" were MediaCorp 90.5 FM's Tim O, Denise Tan, Hamish Brown and Maggie Lim.

But, as it had in its previous reports, the committee signalled its concern about the use of "excessive Singlish" on air. In particular, Pace felt Safra Radio's Power 98 deejays' overuse of Singlish to "appeal" to National Servicemen "was not only an embarrassment to the station, but it also sent the wrong message to young listeners that speaking Singlish was acceptable and cool".

Pace also felt Power 98 and MediaCorp's 98.7FM "lacked consistency" in presenters' news-reading. It was "often embarrassing" to hear, especially Power 98 presenters who "came across as being amateurish".

In response, MediaCorp noted that the news is read by broadcast journalists or presenters who are trained at least once a month in presentation skills, pronunciation and news delivery. Safra Radio said it would try to "maintain a good standard of English" and ensure consistent news delivery.



Hamish Brown was one of several MediaCorp 90.5 FM deejays lauded for maintaining a 'good standard of English'.

## NewsAsia

on *Talking Point* every Sunday. Programmes such as *BlogTV.Sg* and *Get Real* target young people, said MediaCorp.

Programmes for Singaporeans, it explained, must be "balance(d) with the fact that the channel is a regional news and information channel competing with global news players".

It added, MediaCorp will work with the Media Development Authority on more "hard-nosed" interview programmes, while pointing to programmes such as *In Conversation With*, which have "received good reviews".

CNA's assistant vice-president Rohana Mohammed said CNA is "constantly evolving" to serve local and international viewers. For instance, there is now an online component within *BlogTV.sg*. "We will also continue to improve and come up with more incisive and probing programmes."



Sports@SG got the thumbs up for its coverage of local sports.

## Thumbs up for local sports coverage

LOCAL sports programming — on free-to-air and cable channels — earned a glowing report card from Pace.

MediaCorp Channel 5's *The Schools Nationals*, it said, motivated young athletes and instilled a sense of school pride, and the committee hoped to see more programmes targeting youth.

It gave its thumbs up to the channel's *Sports@SG* programme, which showcased local sporting personalities and the latest in the sporting world, and suggested broadcasters also feature local sporting heroes, as well as instructional sports videos.

It would have liked to see more "live" free-to-air coverage of football games involving the national teams, though Pace acknowledged poor viewership could be a hurdle.

Also praised: MediaCorp's and StarHub's coverage of last year's Olympics and the recent Asian Youth Games. The cable operator had dedicated extra channels to each event at no extra cost, while the local broadcaster was applauded for airing Olympic-related documentaries ahead of the Beijing Games.

But Pace was concerned about the "bidding war" between pay-TV operators StarHub and SingTel over the exclusive broadcast rights to the Uefa Champions League. This had led to fans having to pay more to subscribe to both operators' channels.

It "strongly encouraged" the operators

**MediaCorp Channel 5's *The Schools Nationals*, Pace said, motivated young athletes and instilled a sense of school pride, and the committee hoped to see more programmes targeting youth.**

to in future cooperate on an arrangement that would be better for viewers.

Panel member Raymond Lye, citing recent speculation on a possible joint bid for the English Premier League, said: "I hope that comes true ... if it results in lower costs for consumers, Pace would be very happy."

Also in for flak was the use of female celebrities as presenters and interviewers. For instance, ESPN Star Sports has seen Jamie Yeo, Paula Malai Ali and Georgina Chang reporting on football, F1 and tennis respectively.

Pace said it was important presenters be prepared and "well-versed" in the sport. Sports fan and magazine writer Lawrence Tan could not agree more: "Some of them are unbearable to watch."

### OTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

#### PROGRAMMES FOR KIDS

Pace was "pleased" the new okto channel offered more choices for young viewers, but noted cartoons promoting violence remained "common features" and there were more shows on the occult. It wanted more fun and educational programmes. MediaCorp said okto has "been mindful" not to show violent trailers when young viewers are watching TV. It toned down trailers for REM.2, and Freaky Friday was replaced with info-educational programmes. okto also shows dramas, comedy and info-educational programmes.

#### PROGRAMMES FOR SENIORS

Pace reiterated the need for programmes teaching seniors the importance of health and fitness, featuring activities they can join, or on the songs of yesteryear.

#### PROGRAMMES ON CULTURE

Pace wanted entertainment programmes depicting cultures other than the Chinese and Peranakan, without stereotyping them. MediaCorp said it has developed a local series, *Stranger than You*, which features various cultures here and in the region.



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