

Committee of Supply

Debate on the Estimates of Expenditure for the Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts

Amendment Speech (2 min) by Viswa Sadasivan, NMP

“Vasantham” - a lever for Indian Integration

1. Vasantham became a dedicated Tamil language TV channel in late 2008. A key objective was to increase viewership and loyalty, in the wake of competition from India based channels on SCV.
2. While this seems to have worked to some extent with home grown Tamil speaking Singaporeans, it appears that Indian PRs and new citizens are still drawn to India-based TV channels. For non-Tamil speaking Indians - both new immigrants and home grown Singaporeans - India based Hindi channels such as ZEE TV and Sony Entertainment appear to be the draw.
3. This doesn't augur well for efforts to integrate the ethnic Indian community in Singapore. Vasantham can play a stronger role in engaging all ethnic Indians, especially the new immigrants.

4. ***Firstly, there should be programmes designed to reach out to new immigrants.*** This could be through themes (especially in drama) that strike a chord, or formats, such as quiz programmes, that seem to fascinate new immigrant Indians. There could also be more current affairs and info-educational programmes that provide insights on the Singapore way of life.

5. ***Secondly, Vasantham needs to proactively seek out talent amongst new immigrants.*** By involving some of these highly talented individuals, not only are we engaging new immigrants, it'll be a shot-in-the-arm for the quality of local programmes.

6. ***Thirdly, I suggest half- hour English language programming three times a week on Vasantham*** - these slots will carry talk shows, interview programmes and info-educational programmes that will bring non-Tamil speaking ethnic Indians into the loop. The issues discussed will be relevant to the Singapore Indian community as a whole. This is much needed as presently there is no such common TV space to address all members of the Indian community. If we don't drive initiatives such as this, the cultural and language divides could deepen with the non-Tamil speaking Indians watching more India based Hindi channels and not relating to the majority Tamil speaking members of the community. This will not happen naturally - the

encouragement and impetus needs to come from government.

7. Sir, I thank you.
