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Realistic tone to the new `3R'

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IT'S an award-winning programme and for good reason too. The 2002 recipient of the Best Infotainment Programme at the Asian Television Awards, 3R (Respect, Relax, Respond), has done a lot to shed light on issues, some of which have dealt with controversial subjects that are relevant to young women.

Its sixth season, to be aired next month on TV3 and Astro Ria, will feature a "re-vamped" format to bring more focus to the highlighted issue of the week.

"The programme looks very different, from the opening graphics to the inclusion of role play to make it more realistic and relevant to its audience," said 3R co-executive producer Datin Paduka Marina Mahathir at the unveiling of the new format recently.

The episode aired for the media and a few students and young adults (aged between 18 and 27) dealt with sexually-transmitted diseases (STD). "We've created a short drama about the issue at the beginning of the episode. After the drama, we address the issue via interviews with experts, opinions from the public and information on where to get help," said co-executive producer Lina Tan, adding that the format would be followed for upcoming episodes of 3R.

The three bubbly hosts of the programme - Kartini Kamalul Arifin, Low Ngai Yuen and Azah Yazmin Yusof - will play the part of characters in the drama and these characters will remain the same throughout the different episodes of the season.

They will be joined by TV and theatre personalities who will act as the supporting cast in the drama.

"We have always tried to push the boundaries with the issues we cover and we know the restrictions that we have (censorship being the main cause of concern) on television. However, we want to shed light on issues that are relevant to young people in Malaysia, including relationships and sex," Marina said.

She added that the show's intention was to give young people as much correct information as possible in order to help them make decisions.

In the dialogue session with the audience after the screening, it was apparent that censorship was the biggest problem faced. Most of the audience expressed the view that the show shed light on issues - among them STD - that were important if somewhat sensitive.

Saying that the powers that be behind 3R would not self-censor the show's content, she said that the issues tackled were important as was the presentation of the relevant facts.

Among the topics to be aired in the programme's sixth season are sexual harassment in the workplace, women in the army, racism, lesbianism and polygamy.

Marina also said that the programme will reach a new audience when it is aired over Singapore's Suria Channel in May.

(The channel has purchased 20 past episodes of the programme.)

"We also have plans to take 3R to other countries in the region. We have met with a television station in Indonesia which is very keen on the programme," she said, adding that there have also been inquiries from India and Thailand.

She said that the content of the programme would be localised according to each country so that it would be relevant to the viewers there.

It will also feature local presenters.

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