

President 2015/16 address to GBM : Mr Peenal Pankaj Asar



Last year my committee and I were elected into an extraordinary 18 month term. My committee and I agreed to take on this challenge as decided by the GBM, the main aim of the extended tenure was to experiment a new format of event delivery as agreed within the GBM amongst attending members.

The year has been interesting in that the committee delivered in excess of 8 events as well as made strides in bettering the profile of the association as well as improving communication and engagement channels, for example via a new solid website, Facebook updates and registration tool for events. Whilst these may seem like trivial things, they required much work effort and coordination to not only implement but also maintain.

At the offset the committee was committed to delivering what we refer to as 'membership value', that is the membership monies paid give something back to the members. We were also keen to provide a service beyond events, through charity contributions and to help local artists and businesses to grow and be recognized.

Firstly, on the charitable side, we raised over 9000 CHF for charity last year, for example the Nepal relief fund. We worked closely with our partners in Zurich, for example Asha, WYOP, Nachle to mutually benefit from collaboration. In certain cases we also helped those in dire needs, for example repatriation of deceased or providing funds to impacted families.

Secondly, we have proactively engaged with third parties to further the cause for IAGZ, for example with the SICC and ZFF as well as the Indian Consulate for whom we managed an event in February 'Tal Tarang'. We have brought in sponsorship from new sources, Leonteq and AZA being two examples. And have worked with local businesses to promote their trades, Kurry Welt, McGees / Krishnaas, Asia Travel, Swiss Indian Cinema. We also ensured that opportunities were given to local artists to perform at the events, for example the Trishna Troupe.

Thirdly a wide range of events were presented.

I will now describe briefly each one:

Tal Tarang, predominantly managed by Poonam Shyam, a classical dance troupe from India was invited by the Indian Consulate in Bern, a bit inflexible was the agenda and hence the event was on a Tuesday evening and only 40 persons attended.

Easter Egg hunt, predominantly managed by Bella in Affoltern for children

Holi was Ferozas child, over 400 persons attended, the format to have food stalls and internal entertainment was good, but still required external entertainment to add a bit of depth.

Langar was presented by Mayank and Kamal Singh, over 50 persons attended in Langenthal, great day to do seva and enjoy fabulous Punjabi food. The whole approach was manually delivered.

Picnic presented by Tanoy, over 50 persons attended in Kilchberg, played several park games and enjoyed great food. WYOP stand to do a health check. Mention the collaboration.

Hiking presented by Raj, 10 persons attended to go to Mt Rigi; as usual healthy events remain unpopular.

Garba presented by yours truly, about 500 persons attended in Bulach, live band, new temple imported from India through private donations, providing a true festive atmosphere. The Garba is normally a profit making event,

however this year, we provided the best of music and a last minute venue which cost 3000 CHF more than what we usually pay. As a result the venue for 2016 has already been booked so we can avail of better rates.

Diwali presented by Raj, about 300 persons attended, live band, great food affordable event. the Diwali event being a loss was planned, we as an EC had decided that this would be a member only event and that the membership funds would be appropriately used to subsidise the event and make it affordable for all to attend (at 40 CHF). I know in this event there was initially a view to have stalls but the EC deemed it too much of a risk to have stalls in an event of this scale.

Up until this Diwali point we were running a positive balance

Gala presented by Monita Singh , about 140 persons attended, The Gala event was where we experimented, it was presented in a new contemporary style, for the cost of 100 CHF one has access to a central Zurich venue, live singers, esteemed guest speaker, dance troupe, after party and several details which sometimes go amiss (mithai, paan, martini cocktails etc.). Where in Zurich one can get this at such a price is a question to be asked. Still the format was questioned by many, again I stand by my EC and I will not change my stance that we experimented a new modern style. The next EC can decide if the traditional Kongress Haus format with classical dancing etc. is a better recipe.

Unfortunately our aim to provide the best for our members meant we overspent, above that of the revenue, we found it difficult to attract attendees in the numbers which would have allowed us to break even or make a profit. We can of course look into this into more details to have a mishap, but records over the past 3 years how that the Gala continues to make a loss and does not provide the benefits associated with the work effort. A motion which I personally have asked to have a vote upon today.

Some of you have questioned the timing and ask why we rushed to present a Gala in January immediately after Christmas, you may or may not be aware that the EC was already facing resignations due to fatigue after Diwali, I managed to convince my EC to serve out the tenure to March after we had delivered our promised Gala event. An 18 month term where we are delivering in some cases events for over 500 persons was tiring; we too have families and in some cases had to deal with personal & family's health issues.

All in all, as per the slide deck behind me in the majority of events the attendees had an enjoyable time, the association reputation has been upheld, of course with every event there will be good and bad feedback such as the one I posted to Facebook, but I am all for transparency and openness as only then can changes be made. But on the positive side I had much more positive feedback on all events including the Gala where the non-Indian participant feedback was very positive.

We tried to ensure there was something for everyone during the course of the year. For the kids, for the adults, young and old, for the intellects and those who just wanted a bit of Bollywood masala.

I am pleased of the commitment of my EC and highly appreciate the immense effort of all those involved, especially our spouses who also are impacted by our participation and are often forgotten and remain the silent heroes. The personal commitments to the community are immense; of course there are some rewards of holding office too.

My only regret for the year is the financial loss that we present. This was at no point intentional and probably a result of over ambitious planning from the offset, particularly for the Gala. Could we have better planned, yes, could we have better managed as per audit report, yes, but that is hindsight and the cost of learning lessons. In the case of cash credits not matching paper documents at the registration process, all I can say is that we were overwhelmed, we had situations where wither there was a huge queue for entry or we take an 80:20 approach and account for income afterwards. Charitable donations can also be questioned, but in the heat of the moment when a desperate relative calls you for help, the right 'human' thing needs to be done.

I am not trying to downplay the seriousness of this point, but we do not owe any monies to third parties and still leave the association in a good financial standing from which it can operate. I could have brought in sponsorships at the year end to close out the negative balance, I could have also requested the anonymous pledges as per previous

years, but I did not, as once again, it is important that we see where losses are made, why they are made and how they can be rectified.

One factor which never gets mentioned is the extra goodwill value created during the course of the year by each EC, I would say the value of this is above the loss made. The IAGZ brand has grown, has more recognition and is a force to contend with in the market. Yes it has competition now as many regional groups get set up in Zurich, but ultimately remains the only pan Indian association recognized by the Indian Consulate thanks to further help from senior community members. We as an EC provided that membership value, very rarely have I heard that anyone felt short changed and that they 100 CHF was not money well spent.

I hope you afford us appreciation for the whole year output and not limit it to the financial status. After all, the association is a not for profit organization. I know there have already been post mortems on how rectifications can be made and I am confident measures can be put into place to provide control.

Ending my note with a thank you to all of you for your support and participation, the advice of the Advisory committee and all the Zurich based partners and sponsors for their backing.

We the current EC wish the future ECs every success and I hope that from the side-lines I and the current EC can help where possible to see this association grow further and provide the forum for us to enjoy India outside of India.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to serve and putting your trust in us, we hope we have lived up to your expectations and where this has not occurred, it was certainly not intentional.

Dhanewad.