

The Broadcasting Board of Governors is an independent federal agency supervising all US government-funded non-military international broadcasting whose mission is:

To promote freedom and democracy and to enhance understanding through multimedia communication of accurate, objective and balanced news, information and other programming about America and the world to audiences overseas.

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# BBG HIGHLIGHTS

Strategic Goals, Challenges, and Accomplishments Around the BBG

March 2009

Note: This monthly newsletter highlights selected Implementation Strategies of the BBG Strategic Plan, new programming and transmission initiatives, market trends, successes, best practices and other items of interest in fulfilling our mission.



On March 8, Alhurra Television launched *Al Youm (Today)* a new live television show originating simultaneously from five countries on three continents.

## Alhurra Launches Al Youm

On March 8, Alhurra Television launched *Al Youm (Today)* a new, live television show originating simultaneously from five countries on three continents including Dubai, Beirut, Cairo, Jerusalem and Alhurra's headquarters in Springfield, Va.

"Al Youm is an excellent complement to the programming that is on Alhurra and will be the cornerstone of our prime-time programming," stated BBG Governor Joaquin Blaya.

*Al Youm* takes the American morning show format and tailors it to evenings in the Middle East. The three-hour program provides viewers coverage of the latest news from the Middle East, the U.S. and the world; as well as topics such as health, entertainment news, sports, technology, social and cultural issues. *Al Youm* presents straightforward news in a relaxed, engaging environment. The program includes interviews with everyone from politicians to athletes; leaders in business and the arts.

"We wanted to test our limits to have a program that was not only technologically advanced but also engaging for the viewers," stated Fran Mires, *Al Youm's* executive producer. "Al Youm takes viewers beyond the headlines to illustrate the impact these events have on the people."



Al Youm is co-anchored by Jessy Trad and Ahmed El Nagggar

Located in Dubai's Media City, *Al Youm* is co-anchored by Jessy Trad and Ahmed El Nagggar, who are joined by Mona Wehbi in Beirut, Amr Khalil in Cairo and Eman Haddad in Jerusalem, along with news updates from Alhurra's U.S. headquarters.

## Briefs

### Transmission Updates

#### •OCB Gets New Transmitter

During the last week of February, the new 100kW medium wave Harris Broadcast System transmitter was successfully installed at the Marathon Transmitting Station, replacing two older Continental-model transmitters that had been in use since 1985. Training on the new transmitter was also conducted for several technical staff. This complicated installation project was completed solely with an OCB in-house workforce, saving several thousands of dollars.

#### •Talks Continue to get back on the air in Azerbaijan

While authorities operating the Baku Metro system have removed advertisements promoting VOA satellite and Internet from trains, efforts are ongoing to obtain alternate methods of placing VOA and RFE/RL programs in Azerbaijan and Kyrgyzstan. In Azerbaijan, efforts are continuing on the crafting of an "intergovernmental agreement," which the authorities say could put VOA and RFE/RL back on the air. Potential affiliates have been identified in Kyrgyzstan.

### New Programming

#### •Burmese Government Reacts to New VOA Satellite TV Program

In February, VOA's Burmese Service launched its first satellite TV program to Burma, repurposing Web video. Called *Burmese* (Continued on page 3)

### BBG Broadcasters Cover President's Nowruz Message

President Obama's Nowruz greeting to the people of Iran was covered extensively by all BBG broadcasters using all relevant media, including the latest digital innovations. VOA's Persian News Network (PNN) first reported the President's statement on-line, posting video and text with Persian subtitles. The video was also posted on PNN's YouTube site where in its first 15 hours it received over 11,500 visits. Videos, texts and links were also posted on two PNN blogs.

When PNN's TV broadcast day began with *Today in Washington*, the full Obama statement, with Farsi subtitles was run and it aired in each following programs: *Today's Woman*, *News and Views*, *Roundtable*, *Late Edition* and *Newstalk*. PNN's radio show also broadcast it in full.

*News and Views* supplemented its reporting on the Obama statement with world and official Iranian reaction as well as through phone interviews with ordinary Iranians.

RFE/RFI's Radio Farda aired the full audio version several times and quickly received several hundred SMS, voicemail messages and e-mails from Iran in response to the address, many of them thanking Obama for his speech. Articles about and video of Obama's statement were also posted to RFE/RL's Persian [radiofarda.com](http://radiofarda.com) and English [rferl.org](http://rferl.org) Web sites. [VOANews.com](http://VOANews.com)



President Obama's speech to the people of Iran was carried on VOA's Persian News Network.

posted the President's Nowruz message on its Web site as soon as it was released. Many other language services reported the event.

### VOA, RFERL Mark 30th Anniversary of Iranian Revolution

On Feb. 12, Iran marked the 30th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution. BBG broadcasters covered the story from many angles.

Although VOA was denied visas into Iran, Central News correspondents marked the anniversary by filing comprehensive TV packages from Dubai and Lebanon on the state of women's rights in Iran and Iran's relations with its neighbors.

In addition, VOA's TV pieces examined the history and the current status of U.S.-Iranian relations.

VOA's Persian News Network offered special TV programming highlighting the significance of the events of 1979 as well as many interviews with experts on Iran.

For two weeks in late January and early February, RFE/RL's Radio Farda aired a series of special programs exploring the legacy of the

1979 Iranian Revolution. The coverage culminated in a live, three-hour broadcast on Feb. 10 that brought together political activists, scholars and citizens to discuss the meaning of the revo-



VOA's PNN aired extensive coverage of the 30th anniversary of the Iranian revolution.

lution and the future of Iran. RFE/RL's [English-language Web site](http://English-language Web site) also featured extensive coverage of the anniversary, including transcripts of interviews. On Feb. 10, Radio Farda took phone calls from listeners so they could voice their thoughts on the anniversary of the revolution.

## Implementation Strategies at Work

### Employ Modern Communication Techniques and Technologies

#### Agreement Would Allow Peer-to-Peer Distribution of Content

The Office of Marketing and Program Placement (OMPP) has signed an agreement to place VOA Mandarin Television content on the TVU Networks platform ([www.tvunetworks.com](http://www.tvunetworks.com)). The effectiveness of the placement will be carefully monitored to assess its ongoing value.

#### Mobile Distribution Agreement Reached

OMPP finalized a distribution agreement with SMS Media Group for distribution of content from BBG entity broadcasters to mobile telephone users in more than 200 countries, via more than 600 mobile operating companies. The agreement is advertising supported; broadcasters will have 100 characters for each SMS message. An advertisement attached to each message, fully vetted and approved by OMPP, will cover the costs.

#### OCB Adds YouTube, Twitter

The Office of Cuban Broadcasting has created a [YouTube channel](#), which will air stories from Radio and TV Marti. So far, the most viewed stories are those dealing with bloggers in Cuba. OCB has also created a Twitter account. Plans are underway to expand to other social networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook.



OCB's YouTube channel airs stories from Radio and TV Marti.

#### RFE/RL Russian Service Web Site Improved

RFE/RL launched a new and improved version of its [Russian Web site](#) on Feb. 3. A number of new features were added to the Pangea content management system, including a feature that formats content for easy access on Web-enabled mobile phones. The next two sites to move to the Pangea platform will be those in Macedonian and in Ro-

manian for Moldova.

### Facilitate Citizen Discourse

#### Kazakhs Turn to RFE/RL for News, Analysis of Economic Turbulence

On Feb. 4, the Kazakh national currency lost almost 20 percent of its value. This decline, and the government's inability to explain it, caused a near panic in several regions of the country. The RFE/RL Kazakh Service immediately reacted and, using its network of correspondents around the country, to report the situation to its audience on radio and the Web. Experts both in Kazakhstan and abroad offered their analysis and provided reliable information about the devaluation of the currency.

#### Burmese Service Investigates Gem Trade

RFA's Burmese Service broadcast a seven-part series on the impact of the United States' ban on importing gems from Burma, which went into effect in October 2008. RFA interviewed the president of the Thai Gem Association, Burmese gem traders and gem vendors along the Burma-China border. Despite the U.S. ban, RFA found that the trade was pretty much business as usual.

#### VOA Covers Guinea-Bissau Assassination

The Voice of America provided on-the-ground reports from Guinea-Bissau, the impoverished West African country where the president and the head of the joint chiefs of staff were assassinated. Defense Minister Artur Silva, in an interview with VOA's Portuguese Service, confirmed the attacks that left both President Joao Bernardo Vieira and General Batiste Tagme na Waie dead in Bissau, the capital of one of the five poorest countries in the world. The two men were rivals.

#### Tainted Milk Follow Up Reveals Broader Involvement

In a follow up to health issues resulting from the tainted milk scandal, RFA's Cantonese Service reported that another dairy, Dumex, was involved. A woman told RFA that her baby developed kidney stones after drinking milk from Dumex and that her investigations revealed 48 other babies has been affected by Dumex milk. The Chinese government says that state-run labs failed to find evidence of this.

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*Weekly TV Magazine*, the program's first edition provided international and national news and features including a special report on the Rohingya, a predominantly Muslim ethnic group from northern Burma that was persecuted by Burma's Junta and forced to flee to Thailand. The TV program, airing Sunday mornings in Burma and repeated during the week, expands on the service's 3.5 hours of daily shortwave radio broadcasts.

#### •Cambodian Television Begins Broadcasting New VOA Khmer Product

On Jan. 20, TVK (National Cambodian Television) aired *Obama Memorabilia*, VOA's first Khmer-language television feature. TVK has agreed to broadcast two VOA Khmer-language television features each week during primetime newscasts. TVK is one of the top two national television stations in Cambodia.

#### •Tibetan Kunleng TV Increases Replays into Tibet

In order to maximize viewership inside Tibet, VOA Tibetan's popular twice-weekly live *Kunleng TV* program is now being repeated 14 times on AsiaSat3. The replays will help diffuse efforts by the Chinese government to catch Tibetans viewing the *Kunleng TV* program and allow viewers in small villages and institutions to organize group viewings.

#### •New Indonesian Radio Initiatives

VOA Indonesian launched two new

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radio initiatives in February. *Pojokan DC Bersama Patsy* is a weekly 15-minute interactive discussion on political and social developments in the U.S. that is carried on Indonesia's Delta FM network. *DC-Jakarta Chat* is another interactive radio program about popular culture with Global Radio in Jakarta.

## Press Clips

•On March 1, [The Washington Post](#) quoted from a Voice of America interview with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton on the even of her first trip to the Middle East. Ms. Clinton's interview with VOA was widely quoted in various media outlets around the world.

•Alhurra's new show, *Al Youm*, was featured in a March 18 [Khaleej Times](#) online article, which compared it to the *Today Show*.

•The [Awoko](#) newspaper in Sierra Leone reported the retirement of VOA's "Uncle" Ted Roberts, a hugely popular host of *Nightline Africa*.

•The [Washington Examiner](#) published an interview with VOA's director of public affairs, Joan Mower in the paper's popular "Three-minute Interview" section.

•The [Associated Press](#) reported that Voice of America has boosted its radio broadcasts into North Korea this year. The move is supported by South Korean president who has taken a hard-line stance against the reclusive communist regime.

## Gedmin Awarded Linden Medal

RFE/RL President Jeffrey Gedmin, former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana received the Golden Linden Medal of the Minister of Defense of the Czech Republic at a ceremony in Prague on March 13.

The medals were awarded by Czech Defense Minister Vlasta Parkanova for the exceptional role played by the recipients toward the enlargement of NATO and, notably, the accession of the Czech Republic. During NATO enlargement talks in the late 1990s, Gedmin served as executive director of the New Atlantic Initiative (founded by RFE/RL executive editor John O'Sullivan), a position he held from 1996 to



RFE/RL President Jeffrey Gedmin receives the Linden Medal

2001, and was a resident scholar at American Enterprise Institute.

## Engage the World in a Conversation About America

### OCB Airs Discussion of America's Changing Cuba Policy

Senator Richard Lugar presented a report to the Committee on Foreign Relations on the need to change U.S. policy towards Cuba, including the embargo. Radio Marti offered extensive coverage of the report with reactions and interviews. Radio Marti also covered a presentation in Miami by the Brookings Institute of the results of a study that calls on the U.S. government to change policy towards Cuba and the passage in the House of Representatives of a bill that includes changes to regulations for travel to Cuba by Cuban-Americans.

### VOA Scores Exclusive Interview with Hillary Clinton

VOA's State Department correspondent Dave Gollust scored two exclusive interviews with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's prior to her trips to Asia and the Middle East in February. Before her departure, Ms. Clinton discussed her first trip to the Middle East, saying that the Palestinian reconciliation deal (between Fatah and Hamas), which was announced in Cairo, does not necessarily represent "progress" unless Hamas recognizes Israel and meets other international terms for the peace process. The VOA interview was

quoted by AFP, [The Jerusalem Post](#), and by [The Washington Post](#). In another interview, Gollust talked to Secretary of State Clinton just moments after her speech at the Asia Society in New York on her then-upcoming trip to Asia.

## Preserve Credibility and Ensure Overall Programming Excellence

### Alhurra Television Honored by the Al Mada Institute for Media, Culture and Arts

A survey of Iraqi journalists regarding excellence in the media had Alhurra taking home the top prize in 12 categories, including best political show, best cultural show and best sports show.

### VOA Persian TV Wins Awards

VOA's Persian News Network (PNN) received a world bronze medal at the 2009 New York Festival Television Programming and Promotions Awards competition for design work on a special program about the 2008 U.S. presidential election. PNN also earned two finalist certificates for design work on *Roundtable With You*, a five-day-a-week call-in show, and for the best computer animation promotion spot for network identification. International broadcasters from 30 countries on five continents submitted entries to the competition, now in its 52nd year.