

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

February 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.*



RFE/RL's new headquarters officially began broadcasting on Feb. 3. It is located in the Hagibor neighborhood of Prague.

## RFE/RL Opens State-of-the-Art Facility

On Feb. 3, RFE/RL made its first broadcast from its new facility.

The six-minute news bulletin at 18:00 Baghdad time was part of RFE/RL's 17 hours of daily programming to Iraq. The inaugural broadcasts dealt with the aftermath of Iraq's recent elections, its first since 2005.

The broadcast was an important step in relocating all of RFE/RL's more than 500 Prague-based employees to the facility in Hagibor, ten minutes from the city center. The five-story, 236,000 square foot broadcast center features multimedia recording studios, interlinking offices and a modern newsroom. It is also energy efficient and one of the most secure buildings in Europe.

"Our new home is tailor-made to meet the needs of a 21st century media organization," said RFE/RL President Jeffrey Gedmin. "It allows us to stay ahead of the technological curve as we broadcast news and information to many places where authorities are hostile to free and independent media."

BBG Governor Steve Simmons credited a number of partners for the successful completion of

the project. "We could not have done this without the crucial support of the Czech government, the U.S. Congress, and the U.S. embassy in Prague," he said. "The BBG is delighted that RFE/RL employees, who broadcast in 28 languages to 20 countries via radio, TV and the Internet, will now have a state-of-the-art headquarters to meet their needs."



An inside look at the 236,000 square foot building.

The building was designed by the architectural firm Cigler Marani. RFE/RL is leaving its home of 15 years, the former Czechoslovak communist parliament building, which is being turned over to the National Museum.

# Briefs

## Threats to Journalists

•In the fourth attack on an RFE/RL journalist in Central Asia this year, on Jan.19 the editor of the **Kazakh Service's** Web site was attacked by a group of men outside his Almaty home. Ermek Boltay, a young journalist whose most recent reporting focused on social unrest in Almaty, was attacked by unidentified assailants until he lost consciousness. The attack is the second on an independent journalist in Kazakhstan in the past month.

## Transmission Updates

•More than 60 people visited VOA to celebrate the **Hausa Service's** 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, on January 29. Attendees included Alhaji Ikra Bilbis, Nigeria's Minister of State, Information and Communications, and Dr. Bolaji Aluko, a Howard University professor. Representing Nigeria's First Lady Hajia Turai Yar'Adua, Minister Bilbis told the audience: "We recognize and appreciate the vital role VOA's Hausa Service plays as a vehicle of mobilization and development ... We are also particularly thankful for the tremendous attention the service gives to issues affecting women and children."

•Marking the two-year anniversary of the most recent **Somali Service**, the Voice of America hosted a panel discussion Feb. 18 to discuss the many challenges facing the troubled African nation. Harun Maruf Hassan, an editor at VOA's Somali Service, moderated the discussion, which touched on economic, security and humanitarian issues, among others.

•**MBN** is continuing to expand the number of dedicated fiber lines in the region, in order to create a more cost effective network and decrease its dependency on APTN. It also allows MBN to import news packages and entire programs from the region without renting satellite time. MBN currently has dedicated lines from Baghdad, Dubai, Beirut, Cairo and Jerusalem.

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## Strategic Plan 2008-2013: Implementation Strategies

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| 1. Enhance Program Delivery Across All Relevant Platforms                               | Democratic, Free, and Just Societies                       | 7. Develop And Motivate the Workforce to Meet the Changing Conditions of U.S. International Broadcasting |
| 2. Build on BBG Reach and Impact Within the Muslim World                                | 4. Employ Modern Communication Techniques and Technologies | 8. Optimize Broadcasting Operations  |
| 3. Help Audiences In Authoritarian Countries Understand the Principles and Practices of | 5. Facilitate Citizen Discourse                            | 9. Preserve Credibility and Ensure Overall Programming Excellence  |
|   | 6. Engage the World In Conversation About America          |  |

## Implementation Strategies at Work

### Build on BBG Reach and Impact Within the Muslim World

#### VOA Increases Programming to Pakistan's Northwest Frontier

As of Jan. 26, listeners in Pakistan's Northwest Frontier Province and the rest of the country can listen to six hours of programming in Pashto, Urdu and English on FM, medium wave, shortwave and the Internet. The new programming mix—a collaborative effort by VOA's Urdu, Deewa Radio and English services—offers feature news packages, talk shows, analysis of events in the U.S. and Pakistan and entertainment.

#### Afghan Foreign Minister Gives Wide Ranging Interview

On Jan. 28, Radio Free Afghanistan broadcast a wide-ranging interview with Afghan Foreign Minister Rangin Dadfar Spanta, during his visit to Prague for meetings with European Union leaders. In the interview, Spanta insisted that relations with the new U.S. administration are not strained.



Afghan Foreign Minister Spanta gives an interview to Radio Free Afghanistan on Jan..

During his tour of RFE/RL, Spanta told Radio Free Afghanistan journalists, "People trust you and rely on your news and information. You have more listeners in Afghanistan than any other radio station."

*"People trust you and rely on your news and information .You have more listeners in Afghanistan than any other radio station." - Afghan Foreign Minister Rangin Dadfar Spanta*

#### IBB Delegation Travels to Azerbaijan

An IBB delegation traveled Feb. 9-10 to Baku where they presented Azerbaijani counterparts with a draft agreement aimed at getting VOA and RFE/RL back on the air. IBB is awaiting a response. Government officials continue to say publicly that their FM, medium wave and television airwaves are closed by law to foreign broadcasters, but they also say that an "Intergovernmental Agreement" could supersede that law.

### Employ Modern Communication Techniques

BBG broadcasters continue to look for the most effective means to get their information to global audiences. New technologies are opening up a vast array of methods to supplement traditional broadcast avenues or circumvent blocking of those broadcasts.

#### Nokia Project a Big Success in China

In China, VOA is working with Nokia, the cell phone producer, to embed Nokia phones with VOA Mandarin English-language learning programs, the weekly *Business Etiquette* and daily *Learn a Word*. Some 6.5 million phones had the programs as of Dec. 31 of last year. Since VOA began its collaboration with Nokia in March of 2008, there have been over 350,000 downloads of VOA Mandarin by over 200,000 users. In response to Nokia's request for additional content from VOA, the China Branch started providing the language-learning programs *Popular American*, *American Sports English*, and *Words and Idioms*.

**VOA Mandarin Marks HDTV First**

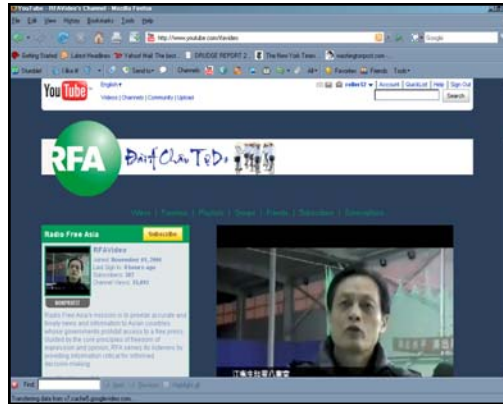
Also in China, VOA Mandarin Video Journalist Roger Hsu produced the Service's first high definition television product for VOA language services, for distribution to Chinese TV stations and through the Internet. His report, *Howard [University] Marching Band*, produced on Jan. 20 in both English and Mandarin versions, showcased the Howard University band and its performance in the inauguration parade.

**OCB Utilizes Redesigned Web Site**

OCB furthered the use of its newly redesigned Web site when Martinoticias interviewed Cuban writer Amir Valle. Valle, who recently sought political asylum in Germany and has won critics' praise for his novels, spoke to Martinoticias about the role of the writer in a free society and the perils found in a totalitarian regime. Martinoticias also featured Reinaldo Escobar, editor of *Voices of Cuba*, the new Web page that features bloggers on the island.

**RFA Pushes Into Web 2.0**

RFA completed a four-month project designed to introduce the use of social media to its editorial services which now include an RFA [YouTube channel](#), blogs in Khmer, Chinese, English, Korean, Vietnamese, Tibetan and Uyghur, five Facebook pages and eight Twitter feeds



RFA's YouTube channel already has over 400 videos for users to view at their convenience.

**Briefs**

•OCB began broadcasting **TV Marti** on VHF on one of the two AeroMarti aircraft in mid-December 2008. The aircraft is now capable of broadcasting on both UHF and VHF simultaneously. The first successful simulcast broadcast was the inauguration of President Barack Obama.

**New Programming**

•VOA's **Urdu** and **Hindi** services launched a new TV segment aimed at encouraging constructive dialogue about bilateral issues concerning Pakistan and India. In the weekly program *Samjhauta Express*, a VOA Hindi and a VOA Urdu journalist discuss issues such as trade, Kashmir, separation of families and farming along the border. The debut segment focused on the role Ambassador Richard Holbooke will play in the region as the new U.S. special representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan. The short program airs on Geo TV in Pakistan and Zee TV in India during the newscasts of VOA Urdu's *Beyond the Headlines* and VOA Hindi's *America Live TV* programs.

•VOA's **Mandarin** Service broadcast an exclusive interview with Chinese dissident Bao Tong, the highest-ranking Chinese government official charged in relation to the June 4, 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. In a wide-ranging interview, the political secretary to the late Chinese Premier Zhao Ziyang challenges the Chinese government to "reappraise Tiananmen" as what he calls a starting point toward a truly harmonious society.

•Iran's environmental challenges are spotlighted in a five-part series on VOA's **Persian News Network** (PNN), which examines air and water pollution, deforestation and decreasing biodiversity across the country.

**Iraqi Elections**

BBG Broadcasters provided extensive coverage of the Jan. 31 Iraqi elections. Despite threats of violence, the country's first ballot since 2005 was mostly peaceful.

Alhurra had 12 hours of live continuous coverage and Radio Sawa expanded its newscasts and dedicated a 30-minute daily news magazine to the latest information on the elections. Both Alhurra and Radio Sawa had reports from throughout Iraq, including interviews with voters, Iraqi leaders and members of parliament. Alhurra also had extensive coverage of the security measures in place at voting centers to help ensure the safety of Iraqi voters.

RFE/RL's Radio Free Iraq added five live segments devoted to the elections. RFI broadcast reports from all over the country, including analysis of all the major issues, comments from voters, and interviews with election officials and monitors. RFI listeners also heard from Iraqi expatriates in Jordan, Syria, Egypt, and even Saudi Arabia via text message.

Iraqis called RFI with first hand information about the polling. One caller complained that many people were being turned away

because their names weren't registered at the polling centers. Another told RFI the elections were "unparalleled in the entire Middle East."

VOA's Kurdish Service provided comprehensive coverage of elections in 14 of Iraq's 18 provinces through on-the-ground coverage by stringers and interviews with candidates, politicians and citizens.



Alhurra presented on-the-ground reports from Iraq's first election since 2005.

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# Briefs

The series ran in the latter part of February.

## Press Clips

•A Jan. 24 editorial in the The Charleston Daily mail said, “taxpayers are well served by their investment” in the Voice of America. The column cited the inauguration coverage as an excellent example of telling the world about peaceful transfers of power.

•On Jan. 27, Time magazine discussed how Radio Free Asia published a series of essays by Chinese Dissident Bao Tong that questioned the Chinese government.

•On Feb. 4, outgoing undersecretary of State for public diplomacy and public affairs, James Glassman, told the National Journal he’d love to see President Obama go on the Voice of America to engage the people of Iran.

•A group of Cuban dissidents urged the U.S. government to keep Radio and TV Martí, according to a Feb. 11 Reuters report. “It has to be assured that these important transmissions to Cuba continue,” one dissident said

•RFE/RL web Editor-in-Chief Luke Allnutt’s op-ed on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Jan Palach’s death appeared in The Wall Street Journal.

•Clifford May, for both the National Review Online and the Washington Times, published an op-ed quoting from SMS messages received by RFE/RL’s Radio Farda in support of Israel’s actions in Gaza.

## Engage the World in a Conversation About America

### Radio Farda Explores U.S.-Iran Relations

RFE/RL’s Radio Farda addressed the potential changes that President Obama will bring to Iran’s relations with the United States. On Jan. 8, a Middle East expert told Radio Farda “President-elect Obama should use the first few months of the administration to put together a serious, coherent, long-term Iran strategy and send very clear signals to Iran that the U.S. is prepared for a more constructive relationship.”

### Ryan Crocker Interviewed on Alhurra

Alhurra had an interview with U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker during which he discussed the future of the People’s Mujahedeen in Iraq. The interview was widely quoted in the U.S. and world press.

### Petraeus Visit Sparks RFE Discussion on U.S. Kazakh Relations

RFE used the January visit of General David Petraeus to Kazakhstan as a springboard for broader discussion of U.S.-Kazakh cooperation in military matters. Petraeus, chief of the U.S. Central Command, was in Kazakhstan to announce an agreement on the transit of non-military goods through Kazakhstan to Afghanistan.

## Vietnamese Ambassador Grants RFA Interview

RFA interviewed the Vietnamese ambassador to the U.S., Le Cong Phung, about U.S.-Vietnamese relations under the Obama administration. This is the first time the Vietnamese government has recognized RFA as a credible news agency. Phung said confidence between the two countries was building.



An RFA reporter speaks with the Vietnamese ambassador.

## Develop and Motivate the Workforce to Meet the Changing Conditions of U.S. International Broadcasting

Training for Alhurra producers, writers and anchors was held Feb. 3-5 and was conducted by Kent Collins, Chairman of the Radio-Television Journalism Department at the University of Missouri. Mr. Collins is planning to host a similar training session for Alhurra’s overseas correspondents in Dubai in the near future.

## Ring in Five Years



Alhurra representatives ring the opening bell at the New York Stock Exchange on Feb. 17. The event was timed to mark Alhurra’s five-year anniversary.