

POITAKHT-INFORM RADIO MAKES DEBUT IN UZBEKISTAN

Rustam Sadykov, reporter, Uzbekistan

Poitakht-Inform is the only FM radio in Uzbekistan to have given up the idea of using live game shows in favor of innovative news presentation technologies allowing not only to hear but also to ‘see’ an event.

August 21, 2002, saw Poitakht-Inform radio station join a posse of 12 FM radio broadcasters now active throughout Uzbekistan. It operates on the wavelength of 107.2. Before, it had already been in operation for a year and a half – since May 2000 – in Samarkand on a wavelength of 104.5. Targeting primarily a young audience, the radio used to give minimum airtime to serious political, economic and suchlike news, centering instead on show business items, rumors, bizarre news and corresponding music material. But because the general public in that ancient city also took interest in detailed reports about the life of the Uzbek capital, an idea sprang up to found a Tashkent-based FM radio station – an initiative that received support from the municipality.

COMMON PRACTICE:

Poitakht-Inform radio is inspired by the idea of broadcasting news about events occurring in the city, country and abroad every fifteen minutes. Hot news is covered in in-depth reports, live broadcasts and talk shows attended by experts. Their newscasts’ objective is not only to bring news to listeners as soon as possible but also to help them get a better understanding of current events with the help of experts or

through direct participation in debates. Of all nongovernmental FM radio stations, Poitakht-Inform covers the largest area with a stable reception of a top-quality stereo signal, that is the whole of Tashkent, 85 percent of Tashkent province and 60 percent of Syr-Darya and Jizak provinces as well as areas close to the Uzbek border in Kazakhstan (Shimkent province) and Tajikistan (Khojent province). Poitakht-Inform is also planning to expand broadcasting across entire Uzbekistan in the immediate future.

The company has opened up its offices in the cities of Samarkand and Jizak. Similar offices are about to start functioning in Zarafshan, Navoi, Ferghana, Namanghan, Urgench and Nukus. According to Poitakht-Inform’s editor-in-chief Alphiya Kharchenko, they offer daily newscasts in Russian, Uzbek and English versions, sports features, reports, press reviews, and music shows. The radio station presents a total of 58 newscasts and 250 reports on a weekly basis. “Our listeners were amazed to hear presentations by presidents of world leading countries, prayers offered by the Pope, the bustle of life, say, surrounding the siege of Yasir Arafat’s quarters or floods in Europe and Asia, etc. The program called News in Detail

helps listeners get an exhaustive picture of events,” says Alphiya Kharchenko.

THE NEED FOR NEW STAFF

From the onset, Poitakht-Inform has run into a number of difficulties, a shortage of skilled personnel in the first place. After moving to the Uzbek capital, a team of 13 journalists, who had previously worked at the radio and television company of Samarkand, found itself to be too small to address new challenges. Meanwhile, professionals able to meet the new management’s standards were very few. There was no time to lose, so they decided to use their own resources to train personnel they wanted. “We teach freshmen a lot of things – an announcer’s technique, journalism, etc. Besides, we are breaking away from traditional ways of presenting news on the FM radio because we are convinced that a serious radio station should not work that way,” says Alphiya Kharchenko, and continues, “Announcers must be able to read out texts slowly and audibly, sputtering being absolutely unacceptable.”

But training news writers and reporters is perhaps the most difficult of all. The idea of offering fresh newscasts every fifteen minutes frequently results in the information becoming dull and superfluous. For example, the radio station agreed with the Tashkent city government that the latter would supply it with daily news

regarding government meetings and suchlike events. But this is not exactly the kind of news its listeners expect from the radio station. Hence the characterization of Poitakht-Inform by Zamira Barayeva, Cand. Sc. (Philology): “One clearly feels that news was written in Russian and translated into Uzbek later on, rather clumsily and with a lot of mistakes. I think radio Poitakht-Inform shows considerable promise but everything depends on the professional standards of its journalists.”

Meanwhile, the latest polls showed that the new FM radio station was by no means ignored by the public. The listeners point to a great variety of news especially favoring world press reviews containing the most urgent issues. Poitakht–Inform is the sole radio that does not practise live game shows. “Our radio station targets people who are over 30 years of age. True, we have lost a teen audience – one which is after those game shows. Yet this is not to say that we are ignoring them. We are considering a possibility to

start a youth show aimed to get young people used to serious reports.”

And here is what Saodat Rasulova, a housewife, 48, thinks about Poitakht-Inform radio station: “It is a very sound radio station. Its programs give you a lot of interesting information - political, economic, sports and so on. You can learn, for example, whether the city is well prepared for the heating season, you can get news about the way municipal, public transport and consumer services really work.”