

INTERNATIONAL RADIO FORUM

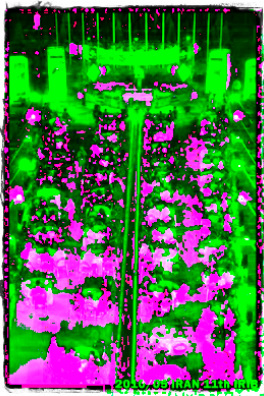
Ziba Kenar Iran May 2010





The third International Radio Forum was held in Iran in May 2010. Timed to coincide with the 11th International Radio Festival, it was located far from the urban sprawl of Tehran, in a green, leafy resort on the placid shores of the Caspian Sea.

The 2010 programme explored responses to the landscape in which radio now finds itself — a world of multi-media convergence and digital production, supply, and consumption.



After a launch outdoors in the balmy night air the previous evening, the conference opened with presentations from **Dr Said Reza Ameli** and **Steve Ahern** on the digital issues facing broadcasters, and a keynote address from Australian radio documentary-maker **Siobhan McHugh**.

Dr Ameli tied the technical elements of multi-media broadcasting together, pointing out that broadcasters must engage with new forms of transmission and receivers, or be left behind. His focus was on how new media can help society achieve its aims.

“Virtual time and virtual networks” now replace the older linear forms of content delivery according to Dr Ameli, and broadcasters must be

aware of how listeners will use time shifting and individual programme consumption patterns to consume content in future.

The digital production environment, non-linear editing and personalised reception were three elements identified by Dr Ameli as key changes facing broadcasters now.

Steve Ahern reported on the latest developments for digital radio in Australia, explaining the importance not only of technology, but of the skilful handling of people and industry politics to achieving that a successful move to this new form of distribution. The case study detailed why Australian chose DAB+ and explained the thinking behind using a 128 Kb/sec bit stream for the new transmission technology. Both were good decisions according to Ahern. There are now 60 models of DAB+ radio for sale in Australia in over 600 stores.



Siobhan McHugh, well known for her radio history documentaries, chose to showcase her radio series on the Snowy Hydro scheme as an example of the conference theme, *Radio: Medium of Hope and Awareness*. The migrant stories from the 1950s, told in McHugh's

documentary, are an example of how radio can create awareness of a changing culture. McHugh believes the medium of radio can be used to spread hope for social improvements through documentaries and features such as the ones she creates.

MediaCorp Singapore manager **Veron Yeo** detailed the success of her stations in connecting with audiences through new media, and her colleague **Zakiah Halim** spoke about the success of various fundraising promotions at MediaCorp, such as a hugely successful cookbook and a series of educational seminars for senior school students.



South Korean KBS producer **Lee Jinhee** told delegates that Korea is "one of the most wired countries in the world" and that most people "interact, rather than just listen." Iranian journalist and academic **Dr Hamid Ziaei Parvari** said there is nearly 13% internet penetration in Iran.

Iranian **Dr Ghotbeddin Sadeghi** focused on Drama in his presentation, telling delegates that characterisation is the most important element in successful drama. The characters must have the essential elements of "a place in society," must emphasise cultural aspects and reveal their

psychological motivations in any well constructed drama. "Radio drama is not based on narrative alone, it is about creating characters in various situations," he said. To create great characters, writers must "refer to the hidden features and internal dimensions of the characters to create many layers."

Similar messages were echoed by Radio New Zealand's **Paul Bushnell**, presenting a paper by **Adam Macaulay**. He also added advice for radio drama producers, reminding them that an important part of their role is to develop the writer as well as the script. In his own paper the next day, he looked at practical examples of how Radio New Zealand had embraced the web, including the creation of a set of iconic radios representing aspects of "Kiwi culture."





The ABU's **Vijay Sadhu** showcased some award-winning entries from the ABU Prizes competition as examples of how radio is changing with the times in its efforts to retain the interest and engage the imagination of listeners. **Masoud AbedinNejad** analysed the features of tabloid journalism and offered advice on where populist entertaining journalism may or may not be appropriate in Iranian radio programming.

An engaging discussion over the role of music in Iranian schedules dominated the final session, with three well known Iranian musicians debating how much music should be



played and where ethnic music should be featured in various programme types. **Dr Shaahin Farhat** made the point that language needs to be translated to be understood, but that music can touch your soul no matter what language you speak. IRIB music specialist **Houshand Javid** talked about the different ethnic and geographic music of Iran should be properly used in folk programs, and **Ali Azari Arghoon** analysed policies for using folk music in both community based channels and national programming.

After the formalities of the conference were over, delegates were treated to a late-afternoon excursion exploring the Gilan province. After passing many paddy fields in which rice is grown, our coaches lumbered up one of the foothills of the Alborz mountain range. From a staging-point, we were whisked by funicular cars further up the hillside, to an area which had spectacular views in the warm afternoon light of the green plains, and the pale blue arc of the Caspian Sea beyond.

Tea pickers were hard at work on the slopes of the nearby hills, cutting the leaves with long shears like hedge clippers, attached to bags into which the cuttings fell. These would be gathered later into piles, and then aired in the sun before removal.



The finished product was sampled with enthusiasm at several of the tea-houses which dot the hillside.



That night, on our return to Ziba Kenar, the culmination of the Radio Festival saw a ceremony in which the major prizes were awarded, along with several musical performances (echoing a concert which had been held the night before). Other prizes had been bestowed on local and international broadcasters during sessions which were interspersed with the conference, and the evening concluded with an address by the President of the IRIB.

Our journey back to Tehran the following day (more than seven hours by fast roads from the Caspian Sea) included a leisurely visit to the Gilan Rural Heritage Museum. Set in a leafy park, it contains many examples of local houses constructed in traditional styles. These buildings had been dismantled at their original sites and re-erected here to provide an insight into the culture of this northern province of Iran.



Many of the houses had guides in traditional costume explaining the construction of the buildings, and day-to-day life of those who had lived in them. It was an intriguing glimpse into an aspect of Iranian history utterly different from the previous year's excursion to the splendour of Persepolis. There could hardly be a greater contrast to the baking heat and arid hillsides of that world heritage site than the casual domesticity of this location, where, under the shade of the trees, we took lunch together.



For all of the international speakers, the business of not only meeting colleagues from round the world, but renewing friendships with Iranian broadcasters and forging new ones, provided the highlight of the conference.

The hospitality, generosity and warmth of those with whom we worked so closely, and who looked after us so well, remains an enduring legacy of the event.







