

Local radio station gains popularity in 'the Pech'

Written by U.S. Army Capt. Jonathan J. Springer, 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment
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CAMP BLESSING, Afghanistan – In the Pech River Valley, a good radio station is hard to come by.

But in Nangalam, a city dubbed as the “Jewel of the Pech” in the war-torn country’s Kunar Province, there is one radio station in the area - 101.1 FM, the “Voice of the Pech.”

According to CIA statistics, 62 percent of all residents in Afghanistan are illiterate. Because of this fact alone, radio plays an important role in the lives of Afghans throughout the country, and specifically in the “Pech.”

“Locals depend on radio for many things, like news and information,” said Abdulsalam Omary, broadcasting manager for the Voice of the Pech. “We try to do our best to have different programming for the people of Nangalam. Our most popular programming is music, Islamic poetry and also our call-in shows.”

Omary, an English-speaking 22-year-old from Nangalam, said he was taught radio broadcasting in Kabul and has been at the radio station for more than seven months.

“We have a staff of eight at the radio station right now. Many of them have been recently trained on radio broadcasting and journalism in Asadabad, and some learn on the job,” Omary said.

The radio station operates out of Camp Blessing, which is a joint base consisting of both the Afghanistan National Security Forces and the 1st Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, Task Force Bulldog.

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Omary said people love the radio station because it's run by the local people and not by the Afghan Nation Security Forces or Coalition Forces.

"The people in the area realize the radio station isn't being run by the military or the government. I think that is the biggest reason why the 'Voice of the Pech' is so popular," Omary said.

U.S. Army 1st Lt. Aaron Barker, from Task Force Bulldog's fires and effects coordination cell, works with Omary on a constant basis and is surprised at just how successful the radio station has become.

"These guys do a great job at the station," said Barker who's from Key West, Fla. "They are working constantly and always striving to change their programming to meet the needs of the locals in the Pech. It's operated just like a radio station in the United States," he said.

Barker said the "Voice of the Pech" is great in the fact that it helps locals remain informed on regional and world news, and it gives them perspective on what is happening within their own government.

Omary agreed, and said he hopes the success with the radio station continues.

"The 'Voice of the Pech' has become very popular. Sometimes, I go down to the local bazaar in Nangalam and people are always giving me thumbs up and waiving. I feel like a celebrity sometimes," said Omary, smiling.