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Upgraded Police Web Site Tries For Openness

By Olga Razumovskaya

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A blog by Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev could be added to the site.

The Interior Ministry launched a new web site Monday, using advanced web technologies and claiming an era of renewed openness and cooperation with society — a move that comes only a week before recently approved police reforms kick in on March 1.

The launch of MVD.ru happened in the spirit of President Dmitry Medvedev's ardent support for technology and innovation and is aligned with the implementation of the new law on police, but experts wonder whether the efforts to foment openness through their web site are sufficient or genuine.

"The main distinctive feature of our web site is its orientation toward society, the ease of its use and the speed at which we react to people's problems," Deputy Interior Minister Sergei Bulavin said at a news conference Monday.

The improved web site comes as a natural step toward the police becoming more open, Bulavin said, and some of the site's new features are aimed to emphasize that.

The new MVD.ru has "cardinally changed its design and structure" to include some additional information, including a special section called "reform," as well as downloadable application forms for documents and a what-to-do section for frequently encountered situations — like losing a passport, or becoming a victim of domestic violence, being a witness to a crime and reporting a missing person.

The web site is also available in a mobile phone version, has a special option for viewing by people with impaired vision and gives citizens access to detailed contact information for 50,000 local police precinct heads.

The deputy minister admitted that MVD.ru may need some additional work, but encouraged citizens to get involved now and be pro-active by helping the police look for criminals and missing people via online databases.

He also said a number of changes on the web site were to be expected "in the near future" and that certain functionality would be enhanced. The site has been averaging 13,000 users per day since it started early this month.

Planned improvements will include the launch of English, German and Arabic versions of MVD.ru, which will highlight sections on reform and the ministry's counter-terrorism efforts, said Valery Gribakin, head of the Interior Ministry administrative department's public relations department.

Gribakin said that now if a foreigner calls the emergency 02 police number, the operator should be able to direct the call to a police officer who speaks the appropriate language.

It's also possible that Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev, a vegetarian and a yoga aficionado, will have a blog on the web site. There is already a section where citizens can pose questions directly to him.

Gribakin said creating the web site cost "sleepless nights and a lot of effort ... but not a single ruble was spent from the Interior Ministry's pocket to make it," since it was made in-house.

Some experts see room for improvement if the ministry is genuinely trying to reach out to the average citizen.

Dimitrie Ross of SPB Media Buro suggests introducing social networking options if the ministry truly wants the web site to be interactive.

Andrei Soldatov, editor of the Agentura.ru web site and a commentator on police activities, said allowing citizens to track down a filed complaint online would be a good start toward facilitating greater mutual cooperation with citizens.

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