

Persecution of journalists and human rights activists in Uzbekistan. A review

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human rights Uzbekistan

Persecution of dissenters in Uzbekistan became dramatically more intensive after the events in Andijan on May 13, 2005. The authorities began with driving foreign journalists out of the country. Once that was accomplished, they closed offices and bureaus of foreign media outlets and non-governmental organizations in Uzbekistan. Here is an outline of the persecution campaign from independent political scientist Tashpulat Yuldashev.

IWPR Tashkent office was closed in June 2005. Galina Buharbayeva, its director who had seen the outrage in Andijan with her own eyes, was compelled to flee the country. Her sister and Associated Press correspondent Bagila Buharbayeva left Uzbekistan with her. IWPR correspondents Kudrat Babajanov and Tulkin Karayev followed suit.

Tashkent office of BBC World Service was closed on October 27, Tashkent studio of Radio Ozodlik (Radio Free Europe Uzbek Service) on December 12, 2005. Die Deutsche Welle correspondents were denied extension of their accreditation. Voice of America TV programs in the Uzbek language were suspended.

Uzbek division of Internews Network was closed on September 9, 2005. Director of the Tashkent organization Halid Anarbayev and accountant Olga Normuradova were tried, convicted, and eventually pardoned.

Freedom House office was closed in early 2006. The authorities accused this organization of carrying out information war on Uzbekistan. Carlo Boham of Human Rights Watch applied for extension of his accreditation but the request was turned down.

Russian Radio Mayak is available only 5 hours a day in Uzbekistan so that analytical programs like Panorama are never broadcast. Russian TV stations go off the air in Uzbekistan whenever they broadcast critical materials on tortures and other human rights abuses in the republic.

Cable TV studios received the order to strike TVC (Moscow TV-Center), TVC+, and Ren-TV stations off the broadcasting schedule.

Several journalists of Radio Ozodlik found themselves under pressure in the meantime.

Nosir Zokirov was sentenced to six months behind the bars on August 26, 2005. He had allegedly insulted an officer of the National Security Service.

The police frisked Gafurjon Yuldashev on May 17, 2005.

Pregnant Lobar Kainarova was assaulted and beaten by unidentified "roughnecks" on July 1, 2005.

Robjia Mirzaahmedova was detained on September 1, 2005. The police confiscated the tapes she had prepared for a program and erased them.

Husniddin Kutbiddinov was set up in a more devious manner. On February 10, 2006, one of the pro-government web sites posted a fabricated statement in his name criticizing RL information policy and actions of Free Europe Uzbek Service headquarters in Prague.

Once foreign media outlets were thus removed from the picture, the Uzbek authorities turned their attention to the locals. Advokat Press, publication of the Uzbek Bar, was closed on December 1, 2005, for its critical pieces. Some of them were written by Dilmurod Saidov. Saidov is unemployed now, still in the focus of the authorities' attention.

The Law, a quarterly of the Academy of the Interior Ministry, was closed as well. It was found guilty of publishing articles by scientists and specialists with recommendations to the government concerning correction of mistakes.

Radio Dijdor, a private broadcaster from Andijan, was closed in July 2005. The Reporter, a journalistic club in Bukhara, was closed on September 2, 2005.

Internet providers are forced to block access to popular portals of foreign media outlets (including Russian) that report information the government of Uzbekistan would rather see remaining unknown to general public.

Journalist Alo Hodjayev and his family were repeatedly threatened and persecuted. Hodjayev is not permitted to leave the territory of Uzbekistan.

Hodjayev's popular Tribune-uz.info had been blocked by secret services for a long time before the journalist finally closed it. Same thing happened to Bobomurod Abdullayev's web site Ozod Ovoz [Free Voice]. Access to Centrasia.Ru, Ferghana.Ru, and other web sites with critical content is regularly denied to users in Uzbekistan.

Independent journalists making unbiased reports on the state of affairs in Uzbekistan are playing with fire. That they are constantly tailed is common knowledge. Arrest on fabricated charges or for any trifle is a grim possibility any moment. They and their families may be attacked by "unidentified" roughnecks, run over by autos without license plates, and so on...

Pressure was also applied to a prominent human rights activist Talib Yakubov, gifted journalists Alisher Taksanov, Yusuf Rasulov, Inera Safargaliyeva, human rights activist Bashorat Esheva, and many others. They all left Uzbekistan.

Journalist Aleksei Volosevich found himself a target of a campaign in pro-government media outlets at first. On November 9, 2005, the journalist was assaulted and battered. A year later, in September 2006, somebody threw a rock through the window of his second-floor apartment. The police never even went through the motions of looking for the delinquents.

Independent journalist Jamshid Karimov, the president's nephew, is persecuted for criticism of the head of state. In September 2006, the Jizak Municipal Court sentenced Karimov to a six-month course of treatment at the local mental hospital.

Poet Yusuf Juma and his children are under surveillance day and night. Juma himself is currently on the run. Pressure is being applied to journalist Tashpulat Rahmatullayev.

Independent journalist Rajaboi Raupov was assaulted and beaten in Bukhara on July 6, 2005.

Unidentified hoodlums assaulted Ulugbek Haidarov, journalist and human rights activist, on June 24, 2005. Haidarov was recently sentenced to six years imprisonment on charges of extortion.

In March 2006, Die Deutsche Welle correspondent Natalia Bushuyeva discovered that there were commercials all over Tashkent purporting that she was selling her apartment and offering sexual services to customers. Every commercial included her phone number.

Correspondent of the newspaper Hurriyat Gairat Mehiliyev was sentenced to seven years behind the bars in February 2006. Charges of involvement with extremist religious organizations and organization of a coup d'etat had been pressed against the journalist.

Journalist Sergei Yezhkov, Uzmetronom.com author and administrator, is also in the focus of the authorities' attention.

Poet and singer Dadahon Hasanov was sentenced to three years imprisonment (sentence to be suspended) for encroachment on the constitutional regime and insult of President Islam Karimov (Articles 159 and 158 of the Criminal Code). Hasanov was merely composing and performing songs that condemned brutal suppression of demonstrations in Andijan.

Repeatedly beaten and persecuted, human rights activist Yodgor Turlibekov, 70, was recently sentenced to 3.5 years behind the bars. First, he had been charged with encroachment on the constitutional regime, insult of President Islam Karimov, and proliferation of defamatory printed

materials. Another prominent human rights activist Surat Ikramov interceded, and Turlibekov was only tried for fraud (Article 165 of the Criminal Code). Access to the trial was restricted. Ikramov and Turlibekov's lawyer Rustam Tuljaganov were denied the permission to attend - or even to meet with the defendant. Indirect evidence indicates that Turlibekov is under moral pressure in jail.

Human rights activist Yelena Uralyeva was put in a mental hospital more than once. Officers of the police and National Security Service forced their way into her apartment and battered the woman on at least one occasion. Pressure is applied to Uralyeva's family as well. Human rights activist Shaira Sadykbekova, the leader of the Union of Uzbek Human Rights Activists, is regularly intimidated and persecuted too.

Prominent writer Mamadali Mahmudov was sentenced to imprisonment for encroachment on the constitutional regime and other crimes on December 30, 1994. Pressure is being applied to his family nowadays. The family of Murod Jurayev, ex-hokim of the city of Mubarak and former deputy of the Oly Majlis serving time since June 18, 1994, has found itself in a similar situation too. Mahmudov and Jurayev are not to be released before their time is up, their problematic state of health notwithstanding.

Absolutely every independent journalist, human rights activist, and dissenter who has the temerity to question the policy promoted by the Uzbek regime has suffered at the hands of security structures.

Erkin Yakubjanov of Osh, Kyrgyzstan, was arrested on the Kyrgyz- Uzbek state border on July 18, 2005. Yakubjanov spent ten days in a detention cell for the attempt to interview Uzbek border guards "without applying for accreditation in Uzbekistan first."

Also persecuted are Aizam Turgunov, Chairman of Mazlum (Human Rights Society) with his family, poetess Gulchehra Nurullayeva, poetess Halima Hudoiberdiyeva, poet Rauf Parfi's ex-spouse Dilorom Iskhakova, and others.

Arrests of human rights activists followed the events in Andijan. Here is the list of human rights activists and members of political opposition who were seized and sentenced to imprisonment:

Abdugapur Dadabayev, Chairman of the Andijan regional organization of Ezgulik Human Rights Society; Nurmuhammad Azizov, leader of Appeal Human Rights Organization; Mutabar Tajibayeva of the Fiery Hearts Club; Abdurasul Hudoinazarov of the Angren municipal organization of Ezgulik; Norboi Holdjigitov, Chairman of the Ishtihan District Organization (Samarkand region) of the Uzbek Human Rights Society; Hajatulla Holdjigitov, activist of the same organization; Habibulla Akpulatov and Sattor Irzayev, activists of the same organization; Nasim Isakov, activist of the Jizak Regional Organization of the Uzbek Human Rights Society; Azam Farmonov, Chairman of the Syrdarja Regional Organization of the Uzbek Human Rights Society; Alisher Karmatov, activist of the Mirzaabad District Organization (Syrdarja region) of the Uzbek Human Rights Society; teacher Bobomurod Mavlonov, secretary of the Nurabad District Organization (Samarkand region) of Erk; doctor Jamol Kutliyev, secretary of the Gidjuvan District Organization (Bukhara region) of Erk; Dilmurod Muhitdinov and Nurmuhammad Azizov, activists of the Marhamat District Organization of Ezgulik; Musadjan Babadjanov, activist of the Marmahat District Organization of Birlik; Zahidjan Zakirov, activist of the Committee for Individual Rights in the city of Namangan.

Human rights activists Lutfullo Shamsutdinov, Isroil Hidirov, Sodirohun Sufiyev, and others have found life hard indeed.

The list of the persecuted and imprisoned comprises only the names of the people the human rights community knows about or whose families approached human rights organizations for help.

The Uzbek authoritarian regime stiffened its internal policy over the last eighteen months.

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