

WHY TAJIK JOURNALISTS DO NOT GO TO AFGHANISTAN?

By Nargis Zakirova, journalist, Dushanbe

Partly because they can't afford themselves the trip, partly because of a certain reluctance to go to Afghanistan, Tajik media mainly cover the on-going events in the neighbouring country from their office.

Local Tajik newspapers try to publish working, reliable information or original articles by journalists, however they have no correspondents of their own to report from far flung locations because not a single newspaper in the country has enough resources to send journalists on missions even within the republic. Journalists have to keep track of the situation in neighbouring Afghanistan from their offices, by borrowing information from foreign print and electronic mass media, as well as from the Internet.

Charkhi gardun Ltd's Chief editor and Tajik newspaper magnate Akbar Sattorov is certain that sending a newspaper correspondent to where an event took place and spending tremendous resources on it in conditions such as Tajikistan is unreal and brings no reward. For reliable information it is enough to use the Internet. Chief editor of the *Narodnaya gazeta* state newspaper, Vladimir Vorobiyov, is of the same opinion. He believes that not one single sane Tajik journalist will go to cover military actions in Afghanistan; risking his life for a scanty fee, which, for example in our newspaper, is about US\$1.5. Furthermore, he continues, Tajik journalists are not socially protected by the state, and the republic's press & mass media laws do not provide for legal guarantees for

the protection of journalists' health. No insurance is available in Tajikistan for the wounding or death of a journalist in a combat zone, and in the case of a loss of the family provider, his family will be granted a pension in the amount of 2 somoni (US\$0.8). "For me, personally, Afghanistan is of no interest," said

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One of the country's newspaper magnates, Sharif Khamdamov, is of a different opinion. He believes that for the sake of prestige, as well as being an editor's duty, newspapers should send their correspondents to hot spots and cover the events occurring there truthfully. One of Khamdamov's correspondents has already visited northern Afghanistan, however, he failed to answer the question of how he managed to finance the trip and how his reporter managed to get to the country.

Although according to the Information Department of the Tajikistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs

the number of foreign reporters coming to the Afghan-Tajik border increases daily and has reached about 1050 in total by mid-October, Tajik journalists are not burning with desire to get there. "There is, in any case, no reason for Tajik journalists to be sent to Afghanistan," said Marat Mamadshoev, Deputy Editor of the *Asia Plus* newspaper. "Newspapers cannot even afford one way travel costs. Even a "complex service", which includes fees for accreditation, visa,

transport, guards and permission into the frontier zone costs up to US\$400-500. Even if a Tajik reporter is lucky and manages to get enough money, he will never sell the information for a significant profit."

IMPOSSIBLE NEUTRALITY

Independent journalist Turko Dikaev is convinced that Tajik reporters shouldn't be sent to Afghanistan at all, because they would take sides with this or that party, and would never be able to cover the events occurring there objectively. For example, a Tajik journalist will certainly know that he cannot write any material in opposition to Russia, our so-called 'single defender'. However, despite existing financial difficulties some Tajik journalists nevertheless find

ways of solving the problem, for example by hiring themselves out as interpreters to foreign companies.

A TOO EXPENSIVE TRIP

While acting as interpreters Tajik journalists do not forget their professional duty. For example, the last issue of *Asia Plus* published an article by Ilkhom Narziev, "An assignment in the war", in which the author details the current situation and developing events in Afghanistan. In the opinion of many journalists this allowed the dissemination of some dubious facts distributed by various foreign companies and mass media. Furthermore, Ilkhom Narziev believes that no print media in the country can afford to send their reporters anywhere, in particular to hot spots where lots of money is necessary. A single business trip to Afghanistan requires about US\$4,000-5,000. "Therefore," considers Mr. Narziev, "it would be more reasonable if Tajik journalists kept track of the situation and scribbled their articles while sitting in their offices." Narziev himself visited Afghanistan while accompanying the German ARD enterprise.

According to the information of some eyewitnesses there has been no war in Afghanistan so far, but rather exchanges of fire and trench warfare. Daler Rakhimov, a volunteer with the National Association of Independent Tajik Mass Media, who visited Afghanistan as an interpreter reported that there are journalists who are sensationalizing the war, and sometimes manage to create picturesque scenarios, while

some reporters pay soldiers money to imitate military actions.

Whatever the case, Tajikistan's print media tries to cover the events in Afghanistan as widely as possible, mainly by reprinting Russian newspaper reports and information from the Internet. A vivid example of is the *Vecherny Dushanbe* city newspaper. The hit of *Vecherny Dushanbe's* last issue (#42 of October 19, 2001) became the article headlined "Americans and Uzbeks – brothers forever", which disclosed a special squad activity and explained why the USA had Uzbekistan. The article was based on various Russian mass media reports. Two articles reprinted from Russian newspapers, "The misinformation war" and Benazir Bhutto's speech of were devoted to same topic. In his column, "The Editor's word", the newspaper's Editor, Sidikov, stated that the Internet is an almost ideal source of information in these difficult times (of accidents, earthquakes and wars). However the messages are inconsistent, and further on the author enumerates them in the appropriate order (in the given context the author means information relating to the terrorist attacks in the USA and the war in Afghanistan). In his conclusion the Editor warns that "... we cannot, dear readers, guarantee the full truthfulness of all the messages that we have received through the Internet from the world mass media about the anti-terrorist campaign."

RUSSIAN TROOPS

In local and national newspapers one also comes across articles by

local correspondents trying to analyze the current situation and forecasting events to come in Afghanistan. The journalists use various genres, but mainly interviews. In the independent socio-political and economic newspaper *Biznis i Politika* (# 38 of October 18) the war in Afghanistan is also an urgent issue. Its latest issue published Grigoriev's interview with the Deputy Chief of the Frontier group of the Federal Frontier Service of the Russian Federation in the Republic of Tajikistan, Petr Zhdanov, headlined "On the brink of war and peace". The *Biznis i Politika* correspondent was basically interested in the current situation at the frontier and the problems faced by the Russian Federation's frontier troops.

REPRINT FROM RUSSIA

The independent newspaper *Asia Plus* is not indifferent to this topic, either (#42 of October 18, 2001). In a recent issue three articles were published, two of them – "Once Pakistan and USA have together developed the Taliban project", and "The third force of the Third World War" – were simply reprints from the Russian newspaper *Nezavisimaya gazeta*. It also published "Afghani children die of starvation", Nabi Yusupov's interview with Abul Fazil Khalili, the Chairman of Aid to Afghanistan, in which the NGO's head told how in Afghan refugee camps two or three children are buried each day. The article also reported the organization's delivery of humanitarian aid collected by the Afghan Diaspora in the USA for their unfortunate compatriots.