

HUMAN RIGHTS UNPOPULAR TOPIC IN SOUTHERN KYRGYZSTAN

Alla Pyatibratova, reporter, Kyrgyzstan

The southern regions of Kyrgyzstan are poor in news media, both in number and variety. Only government newspapers come out more or less regularly in Osh and more than once have they been rebuked for ignoring questions that matter to readers - such as human rights issues.

The editor of the regional Kyrgyz-language newspaper Osh Janyrygy, Mamaraim Dubanayev, admitted it straight out that there is no such issue in the southern media. His opinion is shared by the editor of the literary and publicity magazine *Osh*, Salima Sharipova, who noted that from time to time regional newspapers write about wage delays or old people living miserably, without pensions. "But human rights do not boil down to pensions and wages alone. In addition to economic or social we have also civil, political, cultural and collective rights. They are pretty numerous. Not only do we fail to demand that our government respects these rights but many people just have no idea of them," added Sharipova.

DANGEROUS SUBJECT

At present, there are quite a number of NGOs whose work is aimed at raising public awareness of legal issues - but they target only a small audience. Newspaper publications on this subject, if any, are also calculated to serve a small group of people who are simultaneously authors and readers." A journalist from the city of Jalal-Abad located north of Osh, Egam-

berdy Kabulov, also pointed out that human rights publications in the southern media are just 'single shots'. And even so, contain only facts with no analysis at all.

"Newspapers in Kyrgyzstan's south are filled with write-ups," says director of the Osh television company Mezon-TV and founder of the Uzbek-language newspaper DDD, Mamir Shakirov. "Even if journalists touch upon any issues they see as significant those are actually just of local relevance. More serious problems are raised only occasionally because you see no response, no effect whatever. On the other hand, you may make enemies if you write a serious critical story." "If you dig down far you will not be able to defend yourself, to say nothing of protecting other people, because no legal mechanisms actually work. I know pretty well what it feels like. Now I am wondering whether all this is worth the jitters?" says Salima Sharipova.

Bakyt Ibraimov, an expert of the project "Monitoring of Journalists' Rights Violation", believes that every reporter sets limits for himself, which he tries not to transcend. "Human rights publications are extremely rare in southern

mass media with no investigations at all," he says. Both Bakyt Ibraimov and Mamir Shakirov agree that journalists take no interest in human rights because focusing on this subject is "like milling the wind".

NO DEFENCE?

Lawyer Ermek Beisekeyev, who gives free advice on media rights, pointed out that articles and reports on legal matters, even though insignificant in number, do appear in newspapers. But again these are more concerned with the woes of pensioners and veterans. Legal consultations offered by the regional newspaper Echo Osha for a year were reduced to the rules of drawing up deeds of all kinds. Beisekeyev has organized four seminars this year on the legal instruction of journalists from southern regions. He admits that he saw with his own eyes how poor journalists' knowledge of legal matters was and how badly the reporters needed regular instruction. "Even after undertaking the entire course on various aspects of law some journalists managed to get into a mess: one of them was sued, quite legitimately at that. This means that he failed to learn properly what he had been taught. Now he will have to defend himself on his own and, all things being equal, he has little chance of success," says Ermek Beisekeyev.