THE MONTH IN REVIEW – MARCH 2001

KYRGYZSTAN

PROPERTY OF THE OPPOSITION ASABA PAPER IS CONFISCATED

Owner of the opposition *Asaba* paper Melis Eshimlanov told RFE/RL correspondent on 15 March, that officials began confiscating the paper property. *Asaba* had about 3,000 kilograms of paper at the Uchkun publishing house and this paper is confiscated. Publishing of *Asaba* was suspended on 6 March and the other opposition paper, *Res Publica*, has since been publishing its through *Asaba* journalists. Now, *Res Publica* might also suspend its publication, because of lack of paper. The Arbitration Court ruled last December that *Asaba* must pay the Lion Technichs company 1,072,000 soms (about $22,000) because the paper took a 200,000-som loan in 1994 and was not able to repay it back. According to Eshimkanov, Court officials say that criminal cases against Eshimkanov and chief editor Mamat Sabyrov will be filed if the paper does not pay those 1,072,000 soms. The price of the property is much less. The other opposition paper *Asaba-Bishkek* is also on the brink of closure. Melis Eshimkanov is also one of the founders of this newspaper. The authorities blocked the paper bank account on 15 March to get the imposed 1,072,000-som fine. Its last edition was published on 14 March with 5,000 circulation and according to its chief editor Bermet Bukasheva, a few unknown people bought almost all its copies early in the morning and the paper did not reach the readers.
From RFE/RL, 15-03-2001

INTERNEWS CONCERNED ABOUT SITUATION IN KYRGZSTAN

The Internews Network Kyrgyzstan released in Bishkek on 15 March a statement with expressed concern for journalists' rights in Kyrgyzstan. It states: "On March 13, 2001, the regional court of Jalal-Abad province reinstated a conviction verdict against the independent journalist Moldosali Ibraimov from Jalal-Abad. The Jalal-Abad city court sentenced the journalist to two years imprisonment and a fine of 107,000 KGS (about 2,200 USD) for libel (...) Also on March 13 the Southern Branch of the State Agency of Communications ordered the independent TV station Osh TV to stop broadcasting (...) The last few weeks have also seen the closure of the independent newspaper *Asaba*." "Internews is deeply concerned about these attacks against freedom of speech and journalists' rights in the Kyrgyz Republic and urges foreign representatives, international human rights organizations, Kyrgyz parliamentarians and local NGOs to support Kyrgyz journalists and bring these matters to the attention of the highest levels Of the Kyrgyz government."
Internews is an US-based non-governmental organization assisting media development in more than 20 countries around the world. It opened its representative office in Kyrgyzstan in 1995.//RFE/RL, 15-03-2001

CPJ ON PRESS FREEDOM IN KYRGYZSTAN

The New York bases Committee to Protect Journalists released on 19 March its report on state of press freedom in different world countries. It is said in the report on Kyrgyzstan that "while the press in Kyrgyzstan has enjoyed a reputation for greater freedom than in any other

Central Asian republic, that freedom has in fact been eroding since the mid-1990s. In 2000, pressure on the independent media greatly intensified in advance of parliamentary and presidential elections." "Many observers believe President Askar Akayev is resorting to more ruthless tactics as the economic miracle he promised fails to materialize. A CPJ research mission just before the October 29 presidential poll documented widespread intimidation of the media via official threats, punitive tax audits, and costly lawsuits." Full text of the report is available on the site: http://www.cpj.org/attacks00/europe00/Kyrgyzstan.html, or send your requests for it to: idinovn@rferl.org.// RFE/RL, 19-03-2001

THE ASABA INDEPENDENT PAPER IS CLOSED

Owner of the opposition *Asaba* twice-weekly Melis Eshimkanov announced in Bishkek on 19 March that the paper would not be printed on 20 March together with the *Res Publica* weekly, as it was done since 6 March. According to Eshimkanov, the joint project has not brought any profit and *Asaba* must now find way to survive. The Arbitration Court of Kyrgyzstan ruled on 27 December 2000 that *Asaba* must pay the Lion Technichs company 1,072,000 soms (about $22,000) to repay the 200,000-som loan taken by the paper in 1994. *Asaba* was not able to do it and the local court ordered on 6 March to arrest its property and bank accounts. However, *Res Publica* published articles by *Asaba* journalists since 6 March.*//RFE/RL, 19-03-2001*

SECURITY OFFICIAL DROPS SOME ACCUSATIONS OF JOURNALISTS

The Pervomai district court of Bishkek considered on 20 March the case of the two independent journalists, Viktor Zapolsky and Arkady Gladilov. Zapolsky is chief editor of the *Delo No…* weekly, Gladilov is chief editor of the *Komsomolskaya Pravda in Kyrgyzstan* paper, and plaintiff in the case is Misir Asyrkulov, secretary of the Security Council. He accused the journalists of insulting him and demanded a 1-million-som (about $20,500) compensation from Zapolsky and 200,000 soms from Gladilov. Ashyrkolov's lawyer Nikolai Zhuchkov told the court session on 20 March that Ashyrkulov drops his accusations against Gladilov because has been convinced that Gladilov's paper insulted him unintentionally. Now, the next court session would consider a case of Zapolsky on 30 March. In an interview, published in the Komsomolskaya Pravda in Kyrgyzstan on 1 December 2000, Zapolsky criticized the National Security Service. Originally, Ashyrkulov accused both the journalists and the paper *Komsomolskaya Pravda in Kyrgyzstan* of insulting him and demanded an additional 3-million-som compensation from the paper. On 17 February 2001, he dropped his accusations against the paper.// RFE/RL, 20-03-2001

TAJIKISTAN

TAJIKISTAN'S SPORTS JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION ESTABLISHED

On 1 February 2001, Dushanbe hosted the founding conference of the Sports Journalists Association of Tajikistan (SJAT). The electronic and press media representatives ratified the organization's Charter and outlined activity guidelines. A well-known sports commentator, Narzullo Latipov, was elected as the SJAT President.

TAJIKISTAN'S MEDIA REPRIMANDED BY THE PRESIDENT

"Tajikistan's mass media are incompetent in covering the country's development issues," the Tajik President, Emomali Rakhmonov, said during the expanded session of the republican government on 10 February 2001. The head of State expressed his discontent with the quality and level of summing up the results of the work undertaken by ministries, departments and provincial administrations ("hukumats") in 2000 and the insufficient struggle against economic crimes.

JOURNALISTS' COMPETITION ANNOUNCED

The Soghd provincial union of journalists has announced a journalists, competition for an award named after the well-known writer, playwright and journalist Hoji Sodik. Masters of pen in various genres can participate in the competition. Hoji Sodik was editor-in-chief of the provincial *Hakikati Leninobod* newspaper for many years. The competition results will be announced by 9 September, Tajikistan's Independence Day.

INTERROGATION FOR AN INTERVIEW

Nurali Davlatov, a journalist of *Javononi Tochikiston* youth newspaper (Youth of Tajikistan) was summoned to the police for an interrogation. The reason was the journalist's interview by the *Sadoi Khuroson* (Voice of Khorasan) radio correspondent. In this interview Davlatov expressed his opinion on Tajikistan's political parties' activities. He, however, managed to prove to the police that he had not violated the law.

NEW NEWSPAPER ESTABLISHED

A new newspaper, *Delovaya Stolitsa* (Business Capital City) weekly, has been published in Tajikistan, founded by the Dushanbe city government. According to Svetlana Krasnykh, the weekly's editor-in-chief, it intends to cover the capital's socio-political and economic events.