
TAJIK MEDIA MAGNATES “TO SERVE THE INTERESTS OF SOCIETY”

By Nuriddin Karshiboev, Tajikistan

The owners of the two media-groups which today dominate the printed press market consider that their competition is to serve the interests of the whole Tajik press and of the society itself.

The first newspaper concern includes six newspapers: *Charhi gardun*, *Digest-Press*, *Vecherni Dushanbe* (*Evening Dushanbe*), *Avicenna*, *Aladdin* and *Time is money*. The following four newspapers - *Tojikiston*, *Crime-Info*, *Oila* and *the Advertising newspaper* form the second group. Both media groups are headed by well-known professional journalists. Akbaraly Sattorov heads the first one under the joint name: *Charhi gardun*, and Sharif Khamdamov, a graduate of the Moscow university faculty of journalism, heads the second group: *Oila*.

SATTOROV CONQUERS THE MARKET

In the beginning of the 90's, Akbaraly Sattorov, the owner of six newspapers and a graduate of the faculty of journalism of the St.-Petersburg state university, left journalism as this trade gave him no income to provide for his family. However, in 1994, in the frenzy of the inter-tajik conflict, when the press in the republic was in a deep crisis, Sattorov started a newspaper, named the *Digest-Press*, based entirely on reprints from Russian newspapers. It published stories about known people, society columns, love stories, and various information on events and facts of interest. Readers liked the newspaper. Within a short period of time, it won over the market. Then, Akbaraly Sattorov, encouraged by the success, decided to increase the number of newspapers so that they, as far as it was possible, met the interests and demands of the various levels of readers. Thus, the *Charhi gardun*, a newspaper giving information on the cultural and the social life of the country appeared and (in order to attract the reader's attention) it began publishing love histories and articles about morality and family problems. Sattorov's newspaper *Avicenna* gives medical information as well as crossword puzzles, riddles and tasks. The newspaper *Aladdin* is intended for children. When one of the leading metropolitan newspapers *Vecherni Dushanbe* found itself on the verge of a crisis, Sattorov paid all its debts and took it under his protection. Now the newspaper has become popular and, according to Sattorov, enjoys an increasing readership.

KHAMDAMOV OCCUPIES NICHES IN THE INFORMATION MARKET

Everything began when a well-known journalist in the country, Sharif Khamdamov, became the Chief Editor of *Tojikiston* whose founders were the law-enforcement forces of the country. He very soon came to understand that, in its actual state, the newspaper could not satisfy the readers' demands. "In an attempt to change the situation, we published a number of critical materials," informed Sharif Khamdamov. "But, unfortunately, this invoked a counter-reaction and irritation on the part of one of the newspapers founders - the Ministry of Security. Then, following an in-depth discussion with the Ministry of Security, it became clear to all of us that a newspaper could bring true and objective information to its readers only if it were truly independent." In 2000, being dissatisfied with the newspaper's founders, the journalists reregistered the *Tojikiston* and became its new founders. This turn in the status resulted in the growth of the newspaper's popularity. Now, *Tojikiston* is the only country

newspaper published in three languages: Tajik, Russian and English. By giving information in English, Mr. Khamdamov tries to gain the confidence of foreign readers. “We have to occupy vacant niches in the mass media market of the republic”, Mr. Khamdamov stated. This understanding brought him to issue a weekly journal *Crime-Info* for fans of thriller stories, based on real life, describing bloody tragedies, assassinations and other criminal events. For those fond of family easy reading, the newspaper *Oila* was created. Finally, businessmen wait with interest for regular issues of the *Advertising newspaper*. Thus, in a rather short period of time, there appeared two large private media groups in the republic.

WHAT INFLUENCE OF THE MEDIA GROUPS ?

“In my opinion, this phenomenon is positive”, said Davlat Nazriev, Deputy Head of the information department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan. “Due to the development of the network of independent mass media, pressmen employment possibilities became more extensive. I would like to believe that competition between these two media groups will allow to avoid parallelism and to refrain from repeating similar editions.” “If, now, in the republic there are so many different newspapers enjoying the readers’ stable demands, then all these editions have the right to exist.” This is the way in which the Chairman of the Journalists’ Union of Tajikistan, Khayet Davlatov, commented on the phenomenon. “Most important is the fact that all citizens may enjoy the right of obtaining interesting information.” The “newspaper magnates” themselves assert that their purpose is to raise the status of Tajik independent journalism so that more weight is given to discussing major problems of the society. They consider that healthy competition between the two media groups will serve the interests of the press itself and, what is most important, the interests of the society. This is proved by the fact that in the editorial boards of all the eleven papers there is a normal creative atmosphere, and the media groups holders do not interfere in the creative processes of their staffs, but just set the main directions.