

29 January 2020

TAJIKISTAN: Alleged "extremist", alleged Shia, jail, torture

By Mushfig Bayram, Forum 18

36-year-old Muslim Khayriddin Dostakov is spending his birthday in jail under criminal investigation after having been arrested and tortured. Officials allege he spread "extremist ideas", and questioned him about whether he has become a Shia Muslim or spread Shia beliefs. Dostakov "was tortured with electric shocks" and "lost consciousness several times", Bakhrom Khamroyev of Memorial told Forum 18.

On 29 December 2019 Tajikistan arrested 36-year-old Muslim Khayriddin Dostakov at Dushanbe Airport as he returned from Russia to visit relatives. It is unclear what exactly he is thought to have done, but officials claim that he spread "extremist ideas". Officers have questioned him about whether he has become a Shia Muslim or spread Shia beliefs.

Tajikistan's regime, as well as seriously violating everyone's freedom of religion and belief, is hostile to exercising Islamic beliefs in ways that are not both state-controlled and Sunni Hanafi (http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2138). Unlike Salafi beliefs, Shia Islam has not been banned.

Investigator Khurshed Goibzoda of the Interior Ministry told Forum 18 on 29 January 2020 that "we have two months at our disposal to refer the case to court" (see below).

Dostakov lived in Moscow and one of his main tasks "was to warn Tajik migrants whom he met in Russia about the dangers and consequences of being drawn into the conflicts in Iraq and Syria", Bakhrom Khamroyev of the Russian human rights group Memorial told Forum 18. "It is ridiculous that Tajikistan's authorities accuse him of calling on people to commit extremist activity," Khamroyev stated (see below).

Parvina Iloliyeva, Dostakov's wife, has also strongly denied the authorities' claims. "They have no evidence to prove that my husband propagated extremism or called on people to join extremist groups," she told Forum 18 on 29 January (see below).

While being held in a Dushanbe Investigation Prison Dostakov has been tortured into making a false "confession". Khamroyev of Memorial told Forum 18 that Dostakov "is being tortured and his face and body is all swollen. Dostakov does not look like himself, and was tortured with electric shocks." He "lost consciousness several times". When questioned by Forum 18 about this one Interior Ministry official gave a short laugh (see below).

Norak Police and Dushanbe Prosecutor's Office officials have raided Dostakov's parents' home and confiscated books on "the life of the Prophet Muhammad and his family, the teachings of traditional Islam, and some books criticising movements such as Salafis and others for inciting hostility between Sunni and Shia Islam" (see below).

"Invited for a talk"?

Khayriddin Abdulloyevich Dostakov (born 29 January 1984) is an ethnic Tajik born in Tajikistan, and has Russian citizenship. He is also known as Khayriddin Abdullo. He flew from Moscow to Tajikistan on a Tajik Air flight to visit his relatives.

Officers of Tajikistan's Interior Ministry arrested Dostakov on his arrival at Dushanbe's International Airport on 29 December 2019, Bakhrom Khamroyev of Russia's Memorial Human Rights Centre told Forum 18. On 31 December the Interior Ministry told Radio Free Europe (RFE) that Dostakov is being charged under Criminal Code Article 307-1 ("Public calls for extremist activity") and Article 307-2 ("Organisation of an extremist association").

Emomali Umarjoni of the Interior Ministry claimed to Forum 18 on 28 January 2020 that "the agencies leading the case have not shared any information with us". This contradicted his claim to RFE on 31 December 2019 that Dostakov was "invited for a talk, and after clarification of a few questions he will be released". The Interior Ministry told RFE that "we had information that he [Dostakov] began to spread extremist ideas during the past year."

Investigator Khurshed Goibzoda of the Interior Ministry, who is working on the case, told Forum 18 on 29 January 2020 that "we

have two months at our disposal to refer the case to court". He refused to answer any questions about why Dostakov was arrested and is alleged to have "spread extremist ideas".

Recent jailings, secret trials

After he returned to Tajikistan under amnesty in February 2019, 35-year-old Muslim Sadridin Mulloyev was on 2 January 2020 jailed for 12 years for his earlier membership of the Muslim missionary movement Tabligh Jamaat (http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2535). The court case took place in secret, and his relatives vehemently denied the charges.

In a closed hearing in prison, 68-year-old Jehovah's Witness Shamil Khakimov was on 10 September 2019 jailed for seven years, six months in strict regime custody for "inciting religious hatred" (http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2506). On release in August 2026, aged 74, Khakimov would be banned from religious activity until August 2029. "I am guilty of nothing," he told the court.

Attack, questioned about Shia beliefs

Dostakov lived in Moscow and worked as "a defender of the rights of and consultant to Tajik labour migrants in Russia," Khamroyev of Memorial told Forum 18. One of his main tasks "was to warn Tajik migrants whom he met in Russia about the dangers and consequences of being drawn into the conflicts in Iraq and Syria", Khamroyev said.

For this, Dostakov was attacked on several occasions in Russia from 2015 onwards by people speaking fluent Tajik and stating they were Daesh sympathisers. Russian police have not brought the attackers to justice.

The attackers warned Dostakov that he and family members would be killed if he continued trying to stop other Tajiks getting involved in Iraq and Syria. As he was afraid that he might also be attacked in Tajikistan he was reluctant to return home. He was also afraid that the authorities might target him as he studied at an Iranian university, but as Tajik-Iranian diplomatic relations improved decided to visit his relatives in December 2019.

Dostakov's two school-age nephews had accompanied him from Moscow. After his arrest, police took his nephews to his relatives, but gave no information on Dostakov's whereabouts or the reason for the arrest. Khamroyev told Forum 18 that he later found out that Dostakov was taken to an Interior Ministry detention centre in Dushanbe.

On an earlier visit to Tajikistan in 2019, officers of the National Security Committee (NSC) secret police had questioned Dostakov "about his religious beliefs, whether he had converted to Shia Islam, and whether he shared Shia beliefs with others", Khamroyev of Memorial stated. This made Dostakov suspect that he could be questioned again, but not that he would be arrested and detained.

Tajikistan's regime, as well as seriously violating everyone's freedom of religion and belief, is hostile to exercising Islamic beliefs in ways that are not both state-controlled and Sunni Hanafi (http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2138). Unlike Salafi beliefs, Shia Islam has not been banned.

Lieutenant Colonel Tolibshoh Oyev, Head of the police Department for the Struggle with Organised Crime, is investigating the case, Interior Ministry officials told Forum 18 on 28 January 2020. But he claimed to Forum 18 that "I do not know anything about Dostakov and this case". He refused to answer questions about Dostakov's arrest, detention, and torture.

Dushanbe City Prosecutor Farrukh Nasimov on 22 January refused to say why Dostakov was arrested, his parents' home raided (see below), and why the authorities are accusing Dostakov of "extremism". He claimed that "everybody at first denies their guilt". Asked what exactly Dostakov is alleged to have done, the Prosecutor claimed to be ready to answer Forum 18 "tomorrow in the morning". But on 23 January Nasimov refused to talk to Forum 18.

"It is ridiculous that Tajikistan's authorities accuse him of calling on people to commit extremist activity", Khamroyev told Forum 18 on 28 January 2020.

Parvina Iloliyeva, Dostakov's wife, has strongly denied the authorities' claims. "They have no evidence to prove that my husband propagated extremism or called on people to join extremist groups," she told Forum 18 on 29 January. "They only have statements they extorted from him under torture."

Torture

Khamroyev of Memorial told Forum 18 that a source who knows about the case states that Dostakov "is being tortured and his face and body is all swollen. Dostakov does not look like himself, and was tortured with electric shocks." They said that Dostakov "lost consciousness several times".

Dostakov was shown "a video of Daesh terrorists taking an oath, and told to write down the words of the oath and repeat it to a camera", Khamroyev of Memorial told Forum 18. "Dostakov was then forced to sign the charges against him." Investigators told Dostakov that "your Russian friends [Memorial] will not be able to help you".

Parvina Iloiyeva, Dostakov's wife, told Forum 18 on 29 January that "he told me that all the statements in his name, including when he allegedly took an oath of loyalty to an extremist group are all lies. These are not his words." Iloiyeva said that Dostakov "wrote the confession under dictation. He is extremely frightened, so I decided to speak out because I want to save him."

When Forum 18 asked Umarjoni of the Interior Ministry about Dostakov's torture, Umarjoni gave a short laugh after asking "didn't I already tell you?" He then continued "I do not know anything about it", before refusing to talk more.

Goibzoda of the Interior Ministry also refused to speak about the torture of Dostakov. "I know you ask provocative questions," Goibzoda claimed, before refusing to talk more.

Under the United Nations (UN) Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Tajikistan must both arrest and put on criminal trial for torture any official thought to be responsible.
(http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2138)

No official responsible for torturing people exercising freedom of religion or belief appears to have been arrested or put on trial, including those implicated in the torture of Jehovah's Witnesses in February 2019 (http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2455), as well as officials implicated in torturing Protestants in April 2017. (http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2276)

Raid, religious literature confiscated, relatives questioned

In early January Norak Police and Dushanbe Prosecutor's Office officials raided Dostakov's parents' home in the town of Norak, 70 kms (45 miles) south-east of Dushanbe, Khamroyev of Memorial told Forum 18.

Dostakov's wife confirmed this, stating that the officials confiscated about 100 books produced by "registered Russian Islamic publishing houses".

"They were on the life of the Prophet Muhammad and his family, the teachings of traditional Islam, and some books criticising movements such as Salafis and others for inciting hostility between Sunni and Shia Islam." Iloiyeva observed that "nothing insulting was said about Sunni Islam or other faiths in these books".

Dostakov's relatives "have been summoned and questioned by the authorities about their beliefs and Shia Islam", Khamroyev told Forum 18.

Norak Police Chief Lieutenant Colonel Saidakhror Mirzoyev refused to discuss the raid with Forum 18 on 28 January. He then put both his landline and mobile phones down as soon as on subsequent calls he heard Forum 18's name.

Investigation Prison

Dostakov's relatives "feel concerned for his life in the prison", Khamroyev of Memorial told Forum 18. The authorities are also evasive about the address Dostakov is being held at.

The Investigation Prison address:

Muassisai islohii YaS 3/1-i

Shahri Dushanbe

kuchai Mirzo Tursunzoda

Tajikistan

(END)

Full reports on freedom of thought, conscience and belief in Tajikistan (<http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?country=31>)

For more background, see Forum 18's Tajikistan religious freedom survey (http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2138)

Forum 18's compilation of Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) freedom of religion or belief commitments

(http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=1351)

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If you need to contact F18News, please email us at:
f18news @ editor.forum18.org

Forum 18
Postboks 6603
Rodeløkka
N-0502 Oslo
NORWAY