

Tajik journalist Abdullo Gurbati, who has been assaulted, is confident that it was planned. Experts say that this attack has many similarities to previous attacks on journalists.

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Abdullo Gurbati, a 23-year-old correspondent for the “Asia-Plus” news agency, was beaten by two unknown men on the evening of May 11. According to Abdullo, the incident occurred around 21:20 when he was on his way home from a grocery store.



Abdullo Gurbati. Photo from personal profile on facebook.com

According to Gurbati, he heard someone chasing him. When the journalist looked back, the attacker struck him for the first time. Afterwards, two unknown men in medical masks attacked and punched him for several minutes. The attackers ran away only when Abdullo started screaming and asking for help.

Abdullo Gurbati told CABAR.asia that a check of the cameras at the scene showed that the attackers were waiting for him.

“These two people were waiting for me and planned the attack in advance. This was not a random incident and I was not chosen by chance. They were waiting for me to get there. It is unclear whether they knew about the camera or not, but after I was beaten, a car was waiting for the attackers and picked them up”, said Abdullo.

Gurbati believes that the assault is related to his professional activities, as before that he had received several threatening phone calls. And two days prior to the incident, a stranger asked the address of his home and asked for a meeting. Besides that, two weeks before the incident, a video appeared on one of the anonymous channels on YouTube, where Abdullo

Gurbati was called a man who hates his homeland (“vatanbezori dar vatan buda”). According to the journalist, this style is typical for the so-called “troll factory”, pro-government fakes who criticize those who disagree on social networks.

Abdullo Gurbati is a young journalist, who recently became famous for his resonance materials. For instance, in the beginning of March, he was the author of a report on the panic in the markets of Dushanbe due to forecasts of a possible shortage of flour.

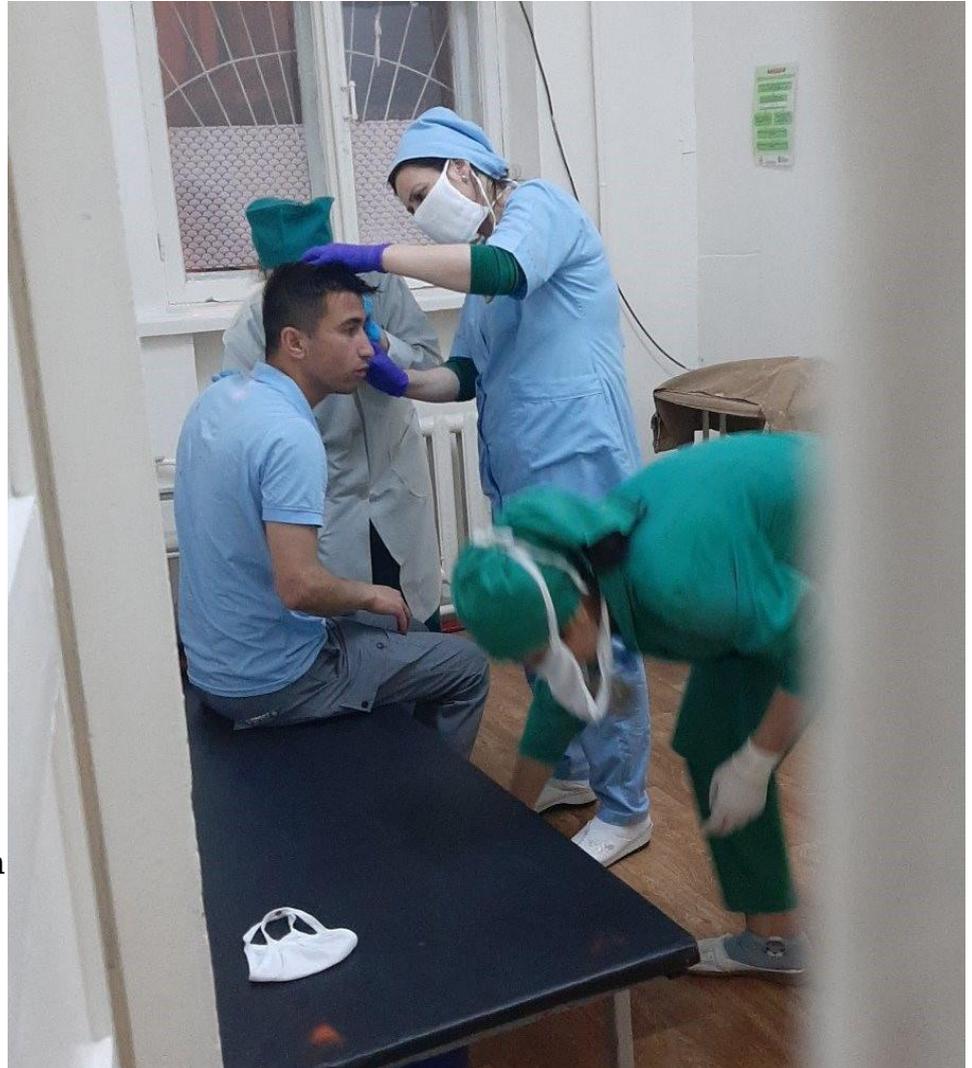
Also, last year Gurbati was accidentally caught by the officers of the police and military and registration enlistment office during a “raid” on recruits. Back then he posted on Facebook a record of how he was taken in a car to a recruiting station. Abdullo Gurbati has also repeatedly criticized the actions of the authorities on various issues.

Gurbati says that during the calls he received before the attack, strangers asked him: “Why did you give an interview to Radio Ozodi and said that the Capital Day should not be celebrated. Do you want quarantine to be declared?”

The case of the attack on the journalist of “Asia-Plus” is being investigated by the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA). The journalist himself says that in the first two days of the incident, police officers of the police department of Rudaki district, where he filed a report, did little to investigate. Therefore, the journalist had to contact the central office of MIA.

I asked MIA to accept my statement. After that, the police officers of Rudaki district, who did not answer my phone calls for two days, came and took me to the MIA. I wrote a second statement, and the case was taken under the control by the head of the department of investigations of the MIA”, - said Abdullo Gurbati.

On May 15, four days following the incident, MIA announced that a criminal case had been opened under article 237 of the Criminal Code (hooliganism) in connection with the assault of Abdullo Gurbati. The Ministry’s press service said in a statement that “the course of the preliminary investigation is under constant control of the head of the MIA”.



Abdullo Gurbati in the hospital after the attack. Photo: Asia-Plus

The assault of the young journalist raised concerns among the human rights organizations. In particular, Human Rights Watch expressed concern about the assault of Abdullo Gurbati and called on Tajik authorities to find the attackers.

Similar statements were made by the Committee to Protect Journalists, OSCE and the U.S. Embassy in Dushanbe. All these organizations and the U.S. Embassy called on the Tajik authorities to create favorable conditions for journalists to work freely.

U.S. Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Alice Wells, stated that “Tajik authorities should

ensure that journalists can work without fear of reprisal”.

“Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, the right to access and share reliable information about medical conditions in Tajikistan is critical to protecting the health of the population. We must support journalists at all times in their pursuit of the truth”, noted Wells.

The Council of the Mass Media of Tajikistan also expressed concern about the attack on Abdullo Gurbati in a statement. According to the members of the Council, as a result of the attack, “there were many opinions and assumptions in the society” about the reasons for the attack. The statements call on the MIA to take actions to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Nuriddin Karshiboev, the head of the National Association of Independent Media of Tajikistan (NANSMIT), believes that the attack on Abdullo Gurbati was “a new warning from certain forces that do not want people to get real information about the spread of coronavirus in Tajikistan”.

According to Karshiboev, this incident demonstrates that professional journalism in Tajikistan “meets resistance from individuals and interested agencies”.

The incident with Abdullo Gurbati is not the first one in Tajikistan

Abdullo Gurbati is not the first Tajik journalist to suffer from an unknown attack. In past years, well-known Tajik journalists such as Rajab Mirzo, Khurshed Atovullo, Hikmatullo Saifullozoda and Daler Sharifov have been attacked.

According to experts, all of these incidents which occurred over the past 20 years have common features. In particular, journalists received threatening messages before being beaten. Most attacks occurred at night near the houses of the journalists.

However, most importantly, investigators did not find the perpetrators in most cases.

Nuriddin Karshiboev, the head of NANSMIT, pointed out that before the attack, a “defamatory” video about Abdullo Gurbati appeared on YouTube network.



Nuriddin Karshiboev. Photo: CABAR.asia

“It is not difficult for the Ministry of Internal Affairs to find the author and client of the video, it has all the technical capabilities. Only then it would be possible to find those responsible for assaulting the journalist”, Karshiboev said in an interview to CABAR.asia.

Rajab Mirzo is a Tajik journalist, who has been attacked twice. As a result of the second incident, the life of the journalist was hanging by a thread and he almost died.

After the report of the incident with Abdullo Gurbati, journalist Rajab Mirzo wrote on his blog that all the attacks on Tajik journalists for the past 28 years have some common features.

He believes that the interested parties are trying this way to distract the public’s attention from important issues.

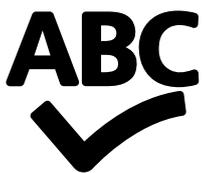
“Employing such means, they awaken fear in the minds of people”, said Mirzo.

Experts are casting doubt on whether the investigation “under the personal control of the head of MIA” will be able to identify the perpetrators and those who ordered the attack.

“We cannot say how the investigation will end. However, we can definitely say that this attack will increase the level of self-censorship among journalists”, stated Nuriddin Karshiboev, head of NANSMIT.

Photo on the main page: web-site asiaplustj.info

This article was prepared as part of the Giving Voice, Driving Change - from the Borderland to the Steppes Project



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