

Dozens of people drown annually with the onset of hot summer weather in southern Tajikistan. The authorities see the cause of this problem in the absence of swimming pools. Experts say the authorities are not doing anything to solve this problem.

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**Khayriddin Kholov**, a 46-year-old resident of the Zargar jamoat in the Kushoniyon district of the Khatlon region, in an interview with Cabar.asia, said that on May 8 of this year, his 17-year-old son drowned while swimming in the Vakhsh River. After that, the majority of the village residents gathered and notified the district authorities on what had happened.

On the same day, the Committee on Emergency Situations and Civil Defense pulled a dead body out of the water. According to Khayriddin Holov, in his village there are no swimming pools so that children cannot swim in hot weather. They are devastated because of what happened to his son and they will never forget that terrible day.



*Children has no other option then swimming in canals and irrigation ditches. Photo: Cabar.asia*

- The weather is very hot so children cannot take it. Because of that they go swimming in canals and irrigation ditches. If the authorities could allocate land for the construction of a swimming pool, I would be ready to build it,"Khayriddin Kholov said.

The administration of the Zargar jamoat reported three cases of drowning in the jamoat over the past three years.



*Sharofiddin Kholov, drowned in the Vakhsh river. Photo CABAR.asia*

Khatlon region, located 120 km from Dushanbe, is considered the hottest region of Tajikistan. The air temperature often rises above 40 degrees there. Local residents, fleeing from the heat, have nothing else but swim in lakes and rivers, due to the lack of pools in the area.

**Zafar Rakhimov**, a resident of the Kushoniyon district of the Khatlon region, drowned at the age of 19 while swimming in the canal 4 years ago. His father, Boymakhmad Rakhimov, said that his family was still grieving about Zafar's loss, when his second son, the 20-year-old Shahboz, also drowned on May 21 of this year. For about a month now, all relatives and employees of the Committee for Emergency Situations and Civil Defense have been searching for his body, but so far, there is no result. Everyday heart-broken parents sit and cry at the bank of the canal, which brought them so much grief.

- It is hard to go through the loss of your children. Their mother faints when she hears her children's names. Unfortunately, we still haven't found the body of Shahboz, "said the father of Shahboz and Zafar.



*The channel in which the 20-year-old Shahboz drowned. Photo CABAR.asia*

Authorities say that children cannot stand the heat, so they are forced to go swimming in water that is not intended for this, endangering their lives.

Every year there are cases of drowning reported in most cities and regions of the Khatlon region. The search for bodies and their transfer to relatives is a very difficult task.

**Fayzullo Huseynov**, senior officer of the Khatlon branch of the Committee for Emergency Situations and Civil Defense in the city of Nurek, notes that cases of drowning are recorded annually in this town. Recreation centers have been built along the banks of the Vakhsh river that flows near, and residents of not only the city of Nurek, but also other cities and regions come to rest there.

About a month ago, the 28-year-old father of three children drowned while driving a jet ski. The staff of local emergency center used all the necessary equipment, conducting searches, but so far the man's body has not been found. Last year five cases were registered, this year - two cases of drowning.

- People call the place where young people drowned «the Quarry». Its depth is about 50 meters. Most of young people do not know how to swim, so they cannot hold on water.

People organize meetings and discussions, saying that it is impossible to swim there. However, due to the heat, people are sometimes have no other option except to swim in such dangerous places, «said Fayzullo Huseynov.

**Murojon Mukhiddinov**, head of the public relations department of regional Committee for Emergency Situations and Civil Defense office, believes that the main reason is the lack of appropriate control of the children by their parents and the lack of swimming pools.

The main cases of drowning in the Khatlon region are recorded in the districts of Kushoniyon and Vakhsh, as well as in the center of the Khatlon region - the city of Bohtar - since there are many rivers and lakes. The Vakhsh River, the largest river in the Khatlon region, flows through these areas.

Murojon Mukhiddinov in an interview with Cabar.asia said that for prevention purpose, special meetings and explanatory discussions are held in institutions, universities, and mosques among teenagers and youth, as well as parents themselves. Despite all their numerous attempts to solve this problem, the lack of swimming pools leads to the death of children, adolescents and youth.

- There should be swimming pools in the area, so that children and youth can swim there. The authorities and entrepreneurs should not stay away from solving this problem,"said Murojon Mukhiddinov.

Civil Emergency and Civil Defense Committee officials say residents are aware of dangerous bathing spots. However, Komron Hafizov, a resident of the city of Bokhtar, in an interview with Cabar.Asia said that there is no any sign of warning or prohibition of swimming in dangerous place.

The population of Khatlon region is more than 3 million people. Alisher Gulov, an employee of the Khatlon region's youth and sports affairs department, said that there are 23 swimming pools in southern Tajikistan, which is not enough for a region of 25 cities and districts. 14 swimming pools will be put into operation in the coming months, but this is not enough.

**Rustami Safar**, an expert in the Khatlon region, noted several reasons for the occurrence of drowning among adolescents and youth. In particular, he believes that parents should take careful control of their children and not let them go outside in hot weather. The lack of swimming pools causes the death of children.

- The irresponsible behavior of the chairs of cities and districts is the reason of this problem not being solved. All local executive authorities have the capacity to build swimming pools and should make every effort to create the appropriate conditions to prevent drowning. Another reason is high cost of visiting swimming pools, which forces people to go swimming in rivers and canals, Rustam Safar added.



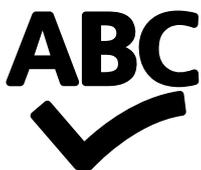
Rustam Safar. Photo: CABAR.asia

In the capital of the Khatlon region, Bohtar, the price of visiting the pools depends on time you spend there. Up to 10 minutes - 1 somoni (about 10 cents), 1 hour of swimming will cost 10 somoni (about a dollar). In Levakand, which has a good and high-quality "Water Park", the ticket price for children aged 6 to 10 years is set at 20 somoni.

According to the statistics of the Khatlon branch of the Committee for Emergencies and Civil Defense, over the past 2 years more than 22 cases of drowning have been registered in the region.

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