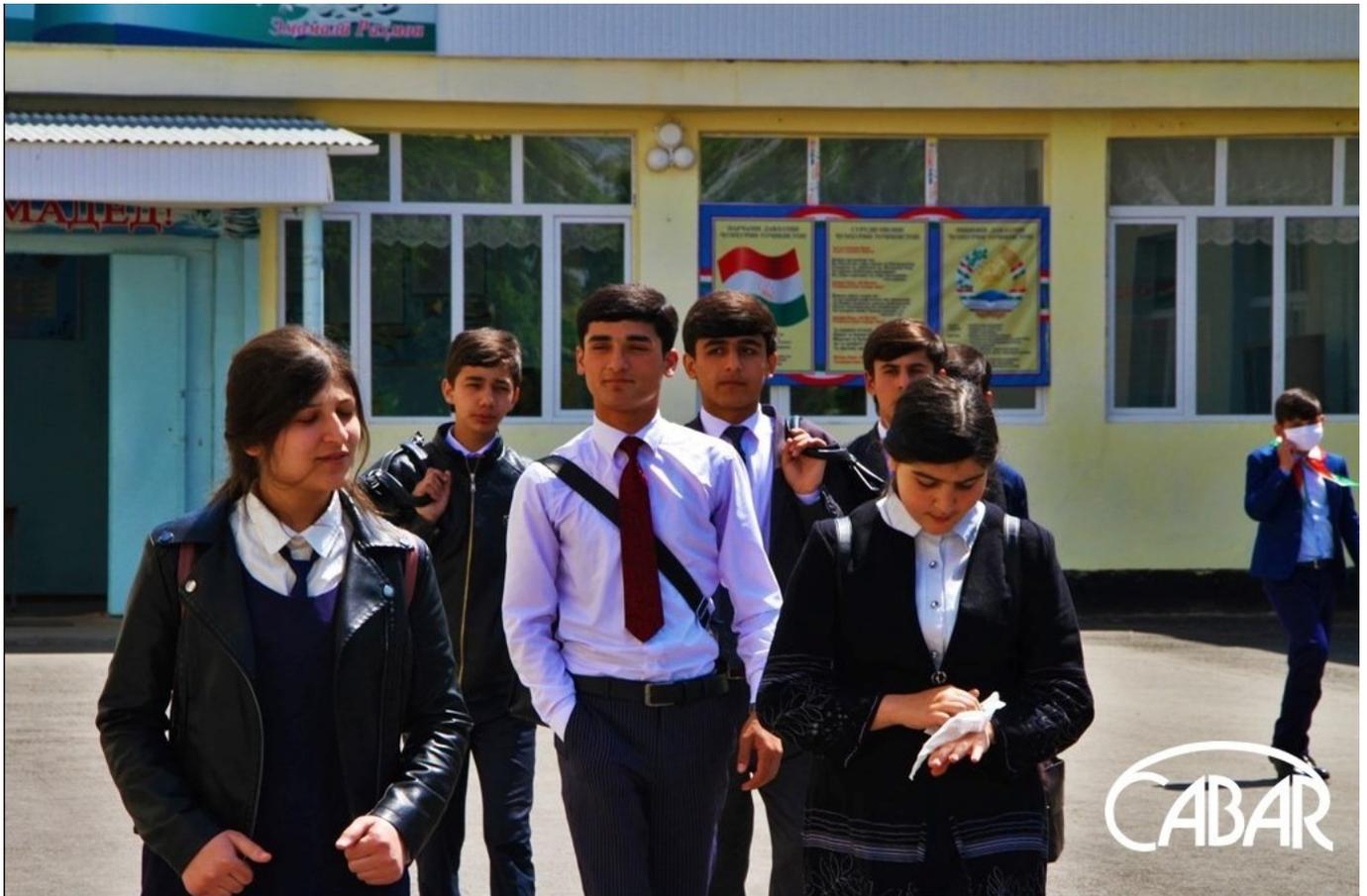


Parents of private schools' students in Tajikistan believe that they should not pay for the school break announced to prevent the coronavirus pandemic. Schools reply that they have financial obligations to employees, tax authorities and banks, so they will not get through it without parental contributions. The expert believes that the state should take burden of the parents and private schools.

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A break for the period from April 27 to May 10 was announced in secondary schools of Tajikistan. After the first officially confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Tajikistan, the break was extended until August 16, although the school year usually lasted until the first decade of June.

On May 3, the Minister of Education and Science issued an order on the salary and leave payments to employees of preschool and secondary educational institutions, regardless of the type of legal entity for the period of temporary suspension of the education process (May, June, July, August).

Even before the media published the order of the Minister of Education, the parents of private schools' students began to discuss this issue in social networks and special groups in various instant messengers.

Parents believe that it is unfair to demand tuition fees from them during the "temporary suspension of the education process".

Maya Temirova, Khujand resident, the mother of the Fayz private school student, said that under the terms of the contract, the school should provide educational services. Temirova wonders why she must pay tuition fees for the absence of education, while her family lost part of their income due to the coronavirus.

"Many parents are in the similar situation. One of the mothers has five children who study in a private school. How can she pay that amount? We expect the school to make concessions," said Maya Temirova.

According to Temirova's contract with the private school, tuition fee is 440 somoni (about \$ 44) per month for 1st to 4th grades and 495 somoni per month for 5th to 11th grades (about \$ 49).

Facebook user **Khurshed Boboev** believes that private schools are trying to shuffle off problems to parents during this difficult time.

"Everyone suffers losses, but it seems that private schools do not realize this fact. Currently, everyone has financial problems; many do not work and cannot even pay for utilities, electricity, and water, etc. In such a situation, the state should help people. However, private schools that made money years before the "plague", should help their employees and teachers in this unexpected situation, and not ask people to pay for services that they do not provide," Boboev wrote.

63 private educational institutions work in the country. In total, 25 thousand 889 students study in these schools.

According to the Ministry of Education and Science of Tajikistan, 1881 teachers work in

private schools. Tuition fees at private schools, lyceums and secondary schools, depending on the region, average from 400 to 1000 somoni per month (from \$ 40 to \$ 100).

Ministry of Education: Parents Should Not Seek Excuses

Most of the users posting in social networks agree that lyceums should defray the expenses of employees' salaries. However, neither the representatives of the country's educational authorities nor the private school administrations agree with this point of view.

Abdurahim Kurbonov, deputy head of the Education Department in Sughd region, told CABAR.asia that teachers, despite the announced break, "continue to go to school and check homework".

"If teachers are not paid during four months, how can they provide for themselves and their children?" wonders Abdurahim Kurbonov.

In his opinion, parents and school administrations should come to agreement.

According to **Ilhomiddin Hakimniyo**, Director of the private educational institution "Lyceum Rahnamo" in Dushanbe, they do not have own funds to pay salaries.

According to him, parents currently are in a million somoni (about \$ 100 thousand) debt to the Lyceum.

"Why are parents not responsible? Even during former times, some did not pay on time. The income received by the lyceum is spent on the taxes payment and teachers' salaries. We have no savings to pay salaries at our own expense in case of unforeseen circumstances," the Lyceum Rahnamo director told CABAR.asia.

At the same time, according to Ilhomiddin Hakimniyo, neither the Tax Committee, nor banks have yet provided benefits to private schools.

"It is natural that schools, in turn, cannot provide benefits to the parents of their students," says Hakimniyo.

The Ministry of Education and Science of Tajikistan also believes that parents should pay for



Ilhomiddin Hakimniyo. Photo from personal Facebook page

months of the break.

The Ministry believes that institutions have fulfilled their obligations to students and parents in accordance with a bilateral agreement, and “there is no excuse for not paying tuition”.

**The payments of teachers' salaries is the
responsibility of the school, not of
students and their parents**

“The school curriculum is mastered, quarterly grades are assigned, the school leaving certificates are issued, and the students transferred to the next grade. What else has to be done to justify the motives of parents not willing to pay?” The Ministry of Education replied CABAR.asia.

Second, the Ministry believes that the children of those “who could and can afford to pay tuition fees” study in these institutions.

“If parents cannot afford to pay for their children’s education, why do they not send their children to public schools? If we want our children to study in a good educational institution, if we want experienced teachers to educate our children, then why do we not pay them salaries?” asks the Ministry of Education and Science.

Financial relations between parents and private schools are defined by the terms of a bilateral contract. According to Maya Temirova’s contract, the school is obliged to create favorable learning conditions for students.

Tajikistan: Parents Are Outraged Over the Private Schools' Requirements During Coronavirus Pandemic



Abdulmajid Rizoev. Photo from personal Facebook page

According to the lawyer **Abdulmajid Rizoev**, if the school has not fulfilled its obligations in this regard, parents may not pay for the remaining months.

“The payments of teachers’ salaries is the responsibility of the school, not of students and their parents. If the school does not fulfill its obligations, parents have the right not to pay,” said Rizoev.

Nevertheless, there are parents who are willing to pay tuition fees to private schools.

Dushanbe resident **Saadi Vorisov**, whose two children attend Kafolat Gymnasium, said he paid tuition fees in advance for the whole school year and currently has no complaints about the early suspension of the education.



Saadi Vorisov. Photo from personal Facebook page

“Teachers continue to work, they assigned reading for the summer break; they called us asking whether the children read books, whether they repeat the lessons at home. They assign homework and teach new lessons to children on the phone. They are people as well, and should be paid for their work. These days will pass, and everyone who has the opportunity, should support them,” said Saadi Vorisov.

How to Break the Deadlock?

According to sources from Dushanbe, in addition to Lyceum Rahnamo, several other private educational institutions faced financial difficulties. For example, Lyceum Rahnamo could not raise a million somoni from parents (about \$ 100 thousand), Lyceum Khotam PV - 2 million

somoni (about \$ 200 thousand), and Kafolat Gymnasium - 1.5 million somoni (about \$ 150 thousand).

Ihomiddin Hakimniyo, Director of Lyceum Rahnamo, says that currently he cannot solve the problem of teachers' salaries. Hakimniyo hopes that the Tax Committee under the Government of Tajikistan will defer taxes payment until the new school year, or the banks will provide soft loans to private educational institutions.

"Once this period is over, we should reconsider our approach. We, just like mobile companies, can suspend the provision of services after the end of the prepaid period or, just like banks, charge interest. However, given the social nature of the problem, we have not yet done so. In case if we are forced to, we can apply similar methods," Hakimniyo added.

According to a Dushanbe lawyer, whose son also attends a private school, "considering the special aspects of Tajikistan," it will be difficult for parents not willing to pay fees to prove their case in court.

In his opinion, the state support is needed in such force majeure situations.

"Tajikistan is a social oriented state, it is written in our Constitution. Right now, the state should resolve problems of private schools and parents," the lawyer said.

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



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