

The authorities claim that Tajik state employees voluntarily transfer part of their salaries to the fund against COVID-19. Anonymously, civil servants say that they were not even asked to give their permission.

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*Tajik leaders, following the example of President Emomali Rahmon, are transferring part of their salaries to the fund for the fight against COVID-19. Illustrative photo. Photo: president.tj*

On April 1 of this year, a special bank account was opened in Tajikistan to raise charitable funds to fight the spread of COVID-19.

On April 30, the first cases of infection with COVID-19 among the citizens of Tajikistan were officially confirmed. On May 1, President Emomali Rahmon decided to transfer his monthly salary to the aforementioned bank account, against the spread of COVID-19.

“We have no other choice.” Salary is partially taken away from civil servants in Tajikistan

Among the first to follow the example of the President was the Minister of Internal Affairs of Tajikistan, Ramazon Rahimzoda, who gave half of his salary to fight the pandemic.

“Now the state-owned media in Tajikistan almost daily reports about employees of a particular public sector transferring half or a quarter of their salary to the fund against COVID-19.”

The state news agency “Khovar” reports that among them are the speaker of the lower house of Parliament, his assistants and deputies, the leadership of the Ministry of Industry and New Technologies, the Committee on Youth and Sports, the Chairman of the Khatlon region, employees of the Antimonopoly Agency, the Academy of Management, and the State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre.



*The Head of the Ministry of Internal Affairs Ramazon Rahimzoda. Photo: ozodi.org*

The government-owned newspaper “Jumhuriyat” recently reported that the Head of the Supreme Court gave a month’s salary, and the judges of the Supreme Court, the city court of Dushanbe and four districts of the capital 25 percent of the salary - a total of 55 thousand somoni (approximately 5.5 thousand U.S. dollars) to the COVID-19 fund.

The Ministry of Finance of Tajikistan, which was appointed responsible for the collection and distribution of aid, informed CABAR.asia that up to June 15 of this year, the special account for the fight against COVID-19 received more than 15.2 million somoni (approximately 1.5 million U.S. dollars), 183.5 thousand dollars in U.S. currency, and 25 thousand in Russian rubles (approximately 361 U.S. dollars). According to the Minister of Finance of Tajikistan, Fayziddin Kahhorzoda, the funds raised have not yet been spent.

The response of the Ministry of Finance notes that individuals and legal entities continue to replenish the account for preventing and fighting the COVID-19 pandemic “following the example of the humanistic initiative of the Leader of the Nation, the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, Emomali Rahmon.”

### **Voluntary-compulsory order**

According to experts, fundraising at the expense of the people resembles the fundraising for the construction of Roghun hydroelectric power plant (HPP). In early 2010, the Government of Tajikistan called on all citizens of the country to buy shares of the Roghun HPP. At that time, the government assured the public that the power plant could be built with public money. The media reported that citizens were often pressured to purchase shares in the Roghun HPP. For instance, drivers at checkpoints were asked to provide shares instead of car documents. In universities, students were not allowed to take exams without shares.



*In early 2010, authorities distributed shares of the Roghun HPP. Photo: asiaplustj.info*

Consequently, approximately US\$180 million worth of shares were sold. However, later, after the advice of international financial institutions, the government abandoned this idea.

Social media users were skeptical about the reports of “voluntary” nature of fundraising. The social media also asked the question: “how can public servants support their families if they give away part of their wages?”

The press secretary of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MIA), Nusratullo Mahmudzoda, was one of the first to transfer funds to the account, for the fight against coronavirus. He told CABAR.asia that the collection of funds among employees of the MIA continues. Among those who have already transferred funds are the Head of the MIA, the deputy minister and heads of departments.

“Hundreds of people across the country received assistance from the employees of the MIA,” said Mahmudzoda.



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Nusratullo Mahmudzoda. Photo: vkd.tj

He rejected claims that funds are being collected forcibly.

“A good deed can never be forced,” said Mahmudzoda.

However, the editorial office of CABAR.asia became in possession of a document from one of the structures of the MIA of the Republic of Tajikistan, dated as of May 2 of this year, with requirements to combat the spread of coronavirus.

The document, in particular, includes a ban on “hugs and kisses” traditional for the Tajik society, and there is a requirement to maintain a distance of one and a half meters among employees. However, it also “suggests” that staff transfer 20 somoni (approximately 2 U.S. dollars) from their salary in May to the special account of this unit for the fight against coronavirus.

“A special account has been opened for the joint fight against COVID-19 in the Ministry of Finance and the Department of Medicine of the MIA of the Republic of Tajikistan. In this regard, it is proposed to transfer 20 somoni from staff salary in May (the deadline is May 25),” the document states.

An employee of the MIA admitted that during a meeting they were asked to transfer money to the special fund.

Lawyer Abdulmajid Rizoiev states that the employee’s salary, regardless of the form of ownership of the enterprise, is his or her personal property:

*“Transferring an employee’s salary to a public or charitable foundation without his or her personal permission and consent is illegal and violates the employee’s property rights (right of ownership)”*



Abdulmajid Rizoiev. Photo from personal page on Facebook.com

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## **A tribute to tradition**

Experts say that in the traditional Tajik society, social relations are often regulated not by law, but by traditions and customs. According to Tajik expert **Emomali Saidamirzod**, the example of top officials, which requires similar actions from subordinates, is especially important.

“This tradition has remained from Soviet times. When “at the top” it was announced that they would give part of their salary for construction of, say, a bridge or a plant, ordinary employees were also forced to follow their example, – he says. – The same thing is happening today. But nowadays, the official salary is not enough even for weekly household expenses. Therefore, it is difficult to believe in the sincerity of these actions.”

He believes that the state considering the current conditions should not try to attract citizens’ funds to fight the pandemic.

“First of all, these expenses should be covered by the country’s budget. Afterwards, we need to attract the help of international organizations and rich countries,” said Emomali Saidamirzod.

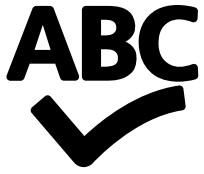
### **“The money should be given. We have no other choice”**

A senior lieutenant of the Tajik police, who wished to remain anonymous, informed that 20 somoni were withheld in May.

According to the policeman, his salary is 800 somoni (approximately 80 U.S. dollars).

“This money is barely enough for 10-12 days. Where will I find money for charity? I myself live at the expense of my brothers. All supervisors know that our salaries do not allow us to spend on charity. However an order came that money should be given. We have no other choice,” said the senior lieutenant.

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