

Explosion in Dushanbe - who stands behind?

On 14 November, early in the morning citizens of the Tajik capital were shocked by a bang of a violent explosion. News agencies immediately reported that one person was killed – a local guard who came across a plastic bag near Kohi Vahdat, a concert-conference complex in downtown area. The bag contained an explosive device.

The conference complex is situated in vicinity to the President’s Palace, the Uzbek Embassy, the Tajik National Bank and a big hotel. The main premises of the ruling National Democratic Party is also located in Kohi Vahdat, which up to 1997 belonged to the Union of Tajik Theaters.

The bomb exploded half an hour before the beginning of the First Consultative Meeting for Disaster Risk Reduction in Central Asia – the event organized by the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO). It was expected that Deputy Prime Minister Aqil Aqilov would attend the Conference.

Prosecutor of Dushanbe Kurbonali Muhabbatov said that the law enforcement agencies have launched an investigation. The main allegation forwarded so far by the National Security Committee is a terrorist attack.

That very morning, President of Tajikistan Emomali Rakhmon accompanied by a number of government officials left for the northern city of Khujand to celebrate the 15-th anniversary of the 16-th session of the Tajik Supreme Council – the historical event that had led the incumbent President to power.

Earlier this year, on 16 June a similar incident took place on the territory of the Tajik Supreme Court. No casualties were reported, but the premises were severely damaged. The authorities then made a similar statement saying that “certain terrorist forces stand behind the explosion”. In 2005 unidentified criminals let off a bomb within a vehicle parked near the Ministry of Emergencies. Several civilians died in the explosion, and a few Ministry officers were injured. The law enforcement agencies also said that “the explosion is the doing of Islamic terrorists”.

As for the latest explosion (on 14 November 2007), there have not been any suppositions that the EU was the target of attackers. However, in July 2000, a Toyota Land Cruiser belonging to the ECHO office in Dushanbe exploded in downtown area, not far from the mayor’s office. One person died in that incident; four residents – among whom three were children – were injured.

Another similar case – three consecutive explosions in Dushanbe on 15 and 16 June 2006, near the Iranian embassy (one hundred meters from the Parliament), near the building of the Islamic Renaissance Party, and near the Tajik Constitutional Court. That was the only case where the criminals “were found”. According to investigators, those were several young hooligans; but the public at large did not buy the story. Experts commented that the explosions (though without casualties) were arranged in order to destabilize the situation on the eve of the presidential election in November 2006.

Officially, the civil conflict ended in Tajikistan in 1997, when the secular government and the so-called United Tajik Opposition (UTO) signed the Peace Agreement in Moscow (Tajikistan has recently celebrated the 10-th anniversary of this event). The last UTO gangs, however, were annihilated only in 2001. Since then, there have not been any militant clashes in the country; but explosions in Dushanbe occur quite frequently. What is peculiar about the explosions is that nobody claims responsibility, nobody puts forward any demands.

The Disaster Risk Reduction Conference organized by ECHO resumed its work on the same day and at the same venue (at 3 p.m. local time).

However, the blast has raised a serious concern among the international organizations accredited in Tajikistan.

One of the foreign agencies has issued an International SOS Comment, saying that “allegedly, members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) might be involved in the attack”. The agency also has an allegation that “the latest attack may also be motivated by domestic political issues”, referring to “Emomali Rakhmon’s recent crackdown on political dissidents and Islamic opposition parties, which has evoked anger amongst various opposition and religious groups”.

The International SOS Comment says that “further attacks on government targets in Dushanbe and other regions of the country are likely”, and “a heightened state of alert and increased security measures in Dushanbe are anticipated”, thus advising expatriates to limit their travel to Tajikistan.

Tajikistan has made a number of commitments to the global community. The authorities are trying to attract investments so badly needed for industry and infrastructure. However, the Tajik leadership is being criticized by human rights watchdogs and the monetary institutions for non-fulfillment of its obligations, slow progress in improvement of the national legislation, unfavorable entrepreneurial environment in the country, and the reluctance to change the situation. Tajikistan’s economy largely depends on remittances from labor migrants, whereas the industry and agriculture remain in deep stagnation.

The Tajik leader Emomali Rakhmon tries to attract attention of the donor community and the closest neighbors calling them to jointly resolve economic and social problems, inevitably leading to local and regional conflicts, but most of his appeals remain unheard.

Konstantin Parshin

Источник: NANSMIT