

Trial of journalist facing extremism charges adjourned

The trial of freelance journalist Daler Sharifov, who is facing extremism charges was adjourned on April 13 until April 15.

A court in Dushanbe's Shohmansour district was scheduled to hold a hearing on April 13 but the judge ordered the adjournment because the state prosecutor was absent.

The journalist's defense lawyer, Abdurahmon Sharifov, said the session had been adjourned until April 15 because the state prosecutor had been absent.

A large group of journalists and civic activists had gathered outside the courthouse in the hope of attending the hearing. However, it is unclear whether the trial will be open to the public.

Daler Sharifov was summoned for questioning to the State Committee for National Security (SCNS) office in Dushanbe's Shohmansour district on January 28 and he has not been seen since.

On January 29, Daler Sharifov was moved from the SCNS office in Dushanbe's Shohmansour district to the SCNS head office.

One of relatives of Daler Sharifov told Asia-Plus on January 29 that security officers had conducted a search of Sharifov's home during which they confiscated several books in Tajik, Russian and Arabic languages. "They said that they will check out the books and will release him after questioning," the relative said.

On January 30, a court in Dushanbe's Ismoil Somoni district ruled that the journalist should remain in pre-trial custody for at least two months.

In a statement released on February 1, the Prosecutor-General's Office of Tajikistan noted that Daler Sharifov is suspected of inciting religious enmity.

The statement, in particular, notes that during 2013-2019, a 32-year-old journalist Dalerjon Sharifov, a resident of the village of Niyogon in the Burun jamoat, which is subordinate to Vahdat Township, published more than 200 articles and commentaries of extremist nature aimed at inciting religious enmity in social networks.

In June 2019, Daler Sharifov published 100 copies of an unidentified text allegedly affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood movement in an underground printing house, according to the statement.

"In this connection, criminal proceedings were instituted against Sharifov under the provisions of Article 189 (1) - inciting racial, ethnic, regional or religious enmity," the statement said.

The journalist could face up to five years in prison if found guilty of charges brought against him.

The journalist's father, Abdumannon Sharifov, denied the charges and said they were retaliation for his son's writing, according to Fergana news agency.

Meanwhile, international media-freedom watchdogs have called extremism charges brought against the journalist "absurd."

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) released a statement on February 6, urging the Tajik authorities to immediately release journalist Daler Sharifov, drop all charges against him, and allow him to work unobstructed.

"Tajikistan authorities should immediately drop the absurd charges against independent journalist Daler Sharifov, release him from custody, and

allow him to continue his reporting,” said Gulnoza Said, CPJ’s Europe and Central Asia program coordinator. “Tajik officials have already driven nearly all independent voices out of the country, so this prosecution is a clear attempt to silence ahead of elections one of the few media critics that remain.”

In a statement released on April 11, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) called Daler Sharifov’s arrest in late January “a new warning by the authorities to critical journalists and media.”

“Daler Sharifov’s arrest ahead of the parliamentary elections in March, unsurprisingly won by the ruling party, and presidential elections in November, is a new warning by the authorities to critical journalists and media,” said Jeanne Cavalier, the head of RSF’s Eastern Europe and Central Asia desk. “We condemn these absurd charges and call for his immediate release.”

According to *Eurasianet*, Daler Sharifov most recently worked for the independent news website *Ozodagon*, which was forced to close shop in 2019. Most of the staff at the newspaper, including its founder Zafar Sufi, have reportedly sought asylum in Europe. After *Ozodagon* folded, Sharifov remained in Dushanbe and continued to work freelance, writing about government campaigns to pressure women into refraining from wearing hijabs and other rights violations, according to *Eurasianet*.

Daler Sharifov had previously worked with Tajik national TV channel *Safina* as author and host of the program “Mushoirat” (Communicating).

<https://www.asiaplustj.info/en/news/tajikistan/laworder/20200414/trial-of-journalist-facing-extremism-charges-adjourned>