

SOS!

Now They Plant Bombs

In Kazakhstan persecution of the independent press has taken an ugly form.

On May 8, Yermurat Bapi, the publisher and “reader-in-chief”, as he calls himself, became the target of an explosion attack. Earlier, in March, he found that his car was put under surveillance. In early April unidentified persons fired several shots at the windows of the editorial office of the newspaper Taszhargan (Stonebreaker). On the night from 7 to 8 May, a bomb was planted on Yermurat Bapi's car. However, the fuel tank of his car did not explode because of the insufficient mass of the planted explosives.

According to the blast designers invited by Mr. Bapi, the bomb was planted between the fuel tank, its enclosure and the fuel pipe connected to the car engine. The plotters arranged for the explosion to break off the fuel pipe, thus, causing detonation of the fuel vapor contained in the tank. A battery was also fitted to the explosive load. The terminals of a detonating fuse were simply mounted on a clothes peg with a fishing line stretched between the peg and the disk of the rear wheel. The “detonating mechanism” went off at the moment the car started moving: the straining fishing line acted to pull the insulator from the clothes peg.

The blaster designers whom Yermurat Bapi asked for expert estimates said that only mere luck saved him from explosion of the car's fuel tank. It can be that the plotters either wrongly estimated the mass of the explosive load or the fuel tank happened to be robuster than expected or else the explosion was organized as a warn to the opposing journalist. After the explosion, which was also seen by the workers at the automobile laundry near Yermurat's house and also by his neighbors, he collected the remnants of the bomb and filed an application to the National Security Committee (KNB) for the city of Almaty.

Since the incident occurred on the eve of the Victory Day, the warrant officer Yermurat came to took the application from him promising to hand it over to a duty officer. Curiously, this officer refused to take the attached material evidence – the remnants of the bomb. Thanks to the warrant officer's refusal, Mr. Bapi could have something to demonstrate to journalists at the emergency press conference held on Tuesday at the National Press Club. KNB officers did not take any investigative actions on the day Yermurat Bapi submitted his application. Only after several days, on Monday, an investigation officer from KNB called Yermurat, though he had nothing to say about how the investigation of an attempt upon the life of the Taszhargan's “reader-in-chief” was progressing.

It is very likely that the whole matter will be hushed up in the end, just the way it was with the application concerning shadowing of the car owned by the founder of the “DAT” project (Yermurat Bapi) when the city department of KNB received from Yermurat an application to which he attached his own photos of the shadowing cars. This time investigators at KNB promised Yermurat to find the shadowers. Then they said that these people drove the cars on permits from car owners and, as always, promised to find them... Now several months have passed with no reply from KNB. Next was the incident when shots were fired at the windows of the Taszhargan's office. Two bullets

fired from a 5.5-mm (0.2 inch) air gun shattered a window pane. We found these bullets but the policemen from the Department of the Interior for Medeusky District did not want to open a criminal case and accept our application. However, pressured by the Tazhargan's employees, they had to do that. Although it has been more than a month, the employees from the Tazhargan's editorial office still know nothing about the investigation results.

They believe that this incident is linked with their professional activities. Our newspaper has always been publishing topical and truthful materials that displease those in power. Recently, the Tazhargan has published a lot of highly critical materials covering the dealings of Timur Kulibayev (the well-known Kazakh oligarch and Nazarbayev's son-in-law) and his father Askar Kulibayev. The Tazhargan has also strongly criticized the State Secretary Kanat Saydabayev. Other members of the so called Kazakh "establishment" are also waiting for their turn. Our publications have also hit hard other high ranking officials who could take such measures to intimidate us. The members of the editorial office believe that these incidents are interconnected. Someone wants to send us a hint saying that our work is a trouble. However, people at the Tazhargan do not link these incidents with the current regime as a whole, but with concrete persons we have piqued by our publications.

And we at the Tazhargan along with Yermurat Bapi do accept this challenge. Yermurat Bapi is ready to meet with those people who have organized these intimidatory actions. The purpose of this meeting is clear and obvious – to find out what they want with all these actions. The Chairman of the Association of Kazakh Journalists Seytkazy Matayev has already agreed to mediate this meeting. He has also sent letters to the Procurator General Rashid Tusupbekov and the Minister of Interior Baurzhan Mukhamedzhanov. In these letters he requests the law-enforcement authorities to answer this question: who is trying to intimidate the journalists. We hope that officials at these two government bodies will be able to solve this matter.

When asked by journalists at the last press conference whether this persecution intimidates him, Yermurat answered that he is not afraid of it. He has been through it many times. He also said to his colleagues that if something happens to him they probably should not take it as a mere coincidence but as revenge from the "heroes" of the Tazhargan's publications. As for the origins of all these incidents, these should be searched for in their doings, not in our publications.

By Maksim SKVORTSOV