

Uzbekistan warns population of extremist activity

By Maksim Yeniseyev, Central Asia Online

11 April 2013

The authorities have defined measures to further prevent propagation of extremism in the country, they say.

TASHKENT – Uzbekistan is turning up the heat on extremists.

After recent extremist activity within its borders, the general prosecutor's office, other state organisations, and non-governmental entities have stepped up their anti-extremist information campaign.

Acting on a tip in February and March, the Interior Ministry (MVD) and general prosecutor's office discovered and arrested members of two extremist groups – Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT) and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) – for conducting illegal activities, the MVD told Central Asia Online.

Authorities broke up a secret group of 15 women in Namangan Oblast for allegedly collecting money and distributing extremist literature in connection with a Kyrgyz-based HT terror cell.

"These women were organised on the 'pyramid' principle," MVD spokesman Samvel Petrosyan explained. "The 'sponsors' would ask someone to return the funds given to her ... as a rule; she ... was forced to 'earn' the money by recruiting new members."

In a separate operation, authorities arrested a group of men and women for allegedly distributing extremist literature and discs on behalf of the IMU in Fergana Oblast and in Tashkent.

Warning campaign launched

In response, state agencies and NGOs are working to educate and warn the population about such dangerous groups.

The Committee of Women of Uzbekistan organised roundtable discussions in the provinces to prevent other women from falling prey to the recruitment tactics of HT, the IMU or any other extremist organisations.

"To withstand extremist propaganda, a woman must have a strong civic consciousness, spiritual and moral principles and an understanding of differences among ... ideologies," Gulbakhor Rizayeva, a member of the Committee of Women, told Central Asia Online. "We consider that one of the main steps should be to start working in universities so that young girls can acquire 'immunity' to 'harmful' ideas in the university classroom."

The MVD is conducting its own meetings, Petrosyan said, pointing to an early March conference in Fergana Oblast about extremism in which mahalla (neighbourhood association) representatives, the general public, and police took part. More such events will take place in the near future, he said.

A similar meeting took place in Tashkent in March, at the National Library, under the title "Extremism is a threat to spiritual morality," library spokesman Sheroz Atadjanov told Central Asia Online: "Those attending included famous public figures and educators – poets, writers and mass media editors. The destructive ideas propounded by movements like [HT] were revealed in detail."

"I learned about this meeting from the library's programme of events and decided to attend it," Dmitri Zemskov, a student of the National University of Uzbekistan, told Central Asia Online. "I came away

thinking that an intellectually developed person would never be hooked by the extremists, because their ideas and slogans are stupid and absurd. They even contradict each other."

"So we must be more active in developing education, particularly in the countryside," he said. "Then the extremists will be unable to find soil in which to sow their 'seeds.'"

"The aim of all these extremist movements is to destroy peaceful life in Uzbekistan," Anwar Kurulnazarov, a teacher at the Islamic University of Uzbekistan, said. "They cover their predatory ideas with the green banner of Islam; they sow discord between Muslims and members of other religions. And ordinary people pay for this with their blood."

"But the worst crime of all is that they abuse books holy to all Muslims to promote their despicable ideas, interpreting them in their own way," he added.

Officials regularly analyse the situation to see what measures are necessary, explained Kodyr V., a spokesman for the general prosecutor's office.

"The Co-ordination Council has discussed and analysed the preventive work undertaken over the past two years," he said. "It is necessary still further to strengthen work in this direction and also to provide the necessary prosecutorial supervision."

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