



## *Nai - Supporting Afghanistan Open Media*

### **Media Watch Report Afghan Journalism Freedom Report #19**

Sediqullah Tawhidi  
**Media analyst**

In this issue, Media Watch highlights the recent clash between Radio Television Afghanistan director and the minister for culture and youth affairs. Minister Abdul Karim Khuram made a senior appointment in RTA without consulting its director, Najib Roshan. According to the Media Law, the minister should have consulted with Roshan and then sought presidential approval for the appointment. The appointment of Abdul Ghani Mudaqiq as director of the radio division of RTA highlights how the administration has once again contravened the rule of law by ignoring the procedures outlined in the Media Law. Furthermore, this case highlights that the independent commission that is meant to oversee RTA is prevented from being fully functional.

Media Watch also investigates the following cases:

- Tolo TV presenter removed following alleged government pressure
- Eqtedar-e-Millie Weekly secretary summoned by prosecutors for writing critique of attorney general
- Kabul Weekly closes due to financial problems
- Abduction of two German journalists denied by officials
- Balkh province journalists protest proposed amendments to Media Law
- Kabul-based radio station organizes peaceful public protest
- Nai Journalism Training Radio begins trial broadcast
- New Herat and Kabul TV stations launch
- Badakhshan RTA building reconstruction begins

## **RTA Chairman, Minister of Culture and Youth Affairs clash over appointment**

RTA Chairman Najib Roshan and Minister of Culture and Youth Affairs Abdul Karim Khuram have clashed over the appointment of Abdul Ghani Mudaqiq as director of the radio division.

Mudaqiq, a former Ariana TV news department director, was appointed to the post by a presidential order on Dec. 20. His appointment angered Roshan, who told journalists in a press conference that he was not aware of the appointment. Roshan said Khuram proposed Mudaqiq to the president without consulting him.

"Due to the RTA chairmanship's ignorance about the appointment of Mr. Mudaqiq, I have asked for a second order from the President," Roshan said. "Therefore, I kindly ask Mr. Mudaqiq not to come to work until a second decree is delivered from the President."

The appointment of Mudaqiq violates the Media Law, according to Afghanistan National Journalists Union President Sayyid Hussain Fazil Sancharaki.

"According to the law, RTA is a public and separate entity from the Ministry of Culture and Youth Affairs, therefore the RTA director and the National Radio and Television Commission, which is based in RTA, are in the position to recruit or dismiss RTA employees," Sancharaki said. "On the other hand, since RTA has not been separated from the Ministry of Culture and Youth Affairs to date, the ministry and the head of RTA can appoint RTA employees by consultation."

The Media Law states that any dismissal or appointment in key RTA departments should be proposed by the RTA director to the National Radio and Television Commission, following which presidential approval can be sought.

As far as the appointment of Mudaqiq is concerned, Media Watch believes that legal procedures were not followed. Likewise, the National Radio and Television Commission, which should have nine members according to Article 30 of the Media Law, currently has only five members. The law states, "For the purpose of regulating the activities of National Radio & Television (NRT) in a better fashion, a National Radio and Television Commission shall be established. The Commission comprised of nine members shall be formed for a period of four years." The commission has not been given its due authority and remains paralyzed.

Media Watch believes that if the laws were applied, the conflict between the RTA director and minister could have been avoided. Given the creation of legal procedures and a rule of law process, it is disturbing that the administration – which is charged with executing the law – is not following the law itself. It's worth noting that the lack of rule of law has been a consistent problem in Afghanistan that has undermined successive administrations.

## **Tolo TV presenter removed after alleged government pressure**

Tolo TV presenter Razaq Mamoon has alleged that he was fired Nov. 28 as a result of political pressure from government officials. Mamoon hosted the controversial *Gufteman* talk show, which examined current affairs, political and economic issues. Senior officials and experts frequently appeared on the show.

Speaking to the Media Watch, Mamoon said: "*Gufteman* was an exceptional talk show in the history of Afghan media that was executed with an absolutely new approach. *Gufteman* monitored the government's activities and exposed each and every deficiency and scarcity. *Gufteman* was based on freedom of speech and it was against domestic terrorism, administrative corruption, oppression and ideological motivations, and the government felt that *Gufteman* was against it."

Mamoon alleges that four senior government officials pushed for the program's end. He named Farooq Wardak, the minister of Government for Parliamentary Affairs and head Office of the Chief of Staff, Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta, the minister of Foreign Affairs, Zarar Ahmad Muqbel, the Interior Minister and Jawid Luddin, the director of the President's Office.

"They acted against the talk show in cooperation with each other," Mamoon alleged.

Mamoon did not blame Tolo TV for his dismissal.

"Tolo TV has no fault in this issue," he said. "The channel defended me as much as it could, but when the pressure increased and jeopardized the channel's interests, it decided in my absence to close down the show," he said.

Tolo TV CEO Sediq Ahmadzada rejected Mamoon's allegations.

"This allegation of Mamoon is absolutely wrong and Tolo has never come under government pressure," he said. "Mr. Mamoon left the job due to a deduction in his salary. The show will still be produced and broadcast."

*Gufteman* is still on air and is being hosted by Massood Qiam and Mohammad Abdullah.

Afghanistan National Union of Journalists President Sayyid Hussain Fazil Sancharaki told Media Watch that political pressure could have been a factor in Mamoon's dismissal.

"Our assumption is that not only were government officials involved in the issue, but powerful people from outside the government were also negative about the show and were claiming that Mamoon was acting as a prosecutor and was investigating interviewees," he said. "But it's not clear whether he was fired because of these pressures or if there were other motives."

Ministry of Foreign Affairs Spokesman Sultan Ahmad Baheen said Dr. Spanta did not act against Mamoon or the show.

"The Foreign Affairs minister is an advocate of freedom of expression and he would never consider bring such a pressure to media," Baheen told Media Watch. "Dr Spanta was not involved in Mamoon's removal and never urged the channel to do so."

Media Watched tried contact Dr. Wardak, but due to engagements, he introduced a spokesman, Asef Nang, to speak on his behalf.

"Dr. Farooq Wardak has no information about the dismissal of Mr. Mamoon from Tolo TV," Nang said. "The channel is independent and has the authority to hire or dismiss its employees."

In a phone interview with Media Watch, Luddin strongly rejected Mamoon's claims.

Interior Ministry spokesman Zemarai Bashiri also rejected the accusations.

"The Interior Ministry is fulfilling its own duties," he said. "The TV channels are fully free in appointing and firing their staff and the Interior Minister Zarar Ahmad Muqbel has never interfered in the media's personnel affairs."

Media Watch believes that if Mamoon's claims regarding pressure from government officials are proved to be true, it will signal a new era of oppression on the media. *Gufteman* was a critical program that created headaches for officials with its serious examination of government inaction and deficiencies. A lack of such critical programs in the media would hinder the checks and balance on the government by the fourth unofficial branch and push our society towards oppression. Media restriction will not only be ineffective, but will serve as a barrier to the country's development.

### **Eqtedar-e-Milli Weekly secretary summoned by prosecutors for writing critique on Attorney General**

Abdul Shukur Akhlaqi, the secretary of Eqtedar-e-Milli Weekly, wrote an article criticizing the Attorney General's war on administrative corruption. Following its publication, Akhlaqi was arrested.

"On Nov. 4, one day after the release of the article, the Attorney General phoned me and I was asked if the published article was mine," Akhlaqi told Media Watch. "I told them that yes, the article was written by me. I was then asked to go the Attorney General's Office to give further details, but as soon as arrived I sensed that the situation was different. I wasn't asked to go there to answer a number of questions about the article because their questions indicated that they were not happy with the article."

Eqtedar-e-Millie Editor-in-Chief Sayyid Mohammad Ali Rezwani said Akhlaqi's questioning was illegal.

"If a violation of the law took place, first of all, it should have been investigated by the Commission on Media Violation, and if deemed necessary, the case should have then been referred to the justice departments," Rezwani said. He added that the Office of the Attorney General asked him to make sure that Akhlaqi would not try to leave the country.

Mohammad Wahid Gharwal, a member of the Commission on Media Violation and head of Kabul University's Faculty of Journalism said: "There have been many cases of journalists being bothered or detained without the commission being informed, which means that journalists were first prosecuted and questioned, and then the issue was referred to Commission on Media Violations."

Attorney General Abdul Jabar Sabet denied questioning Akhlaqi.

"I haven't questioned Mr. Akhlaqi," he said. "Only Dr. Narmgoi was once detained and investigated based on a legal complaint from Mr. Farooq Wardak, the government minister for parliamentary affairs. Personally, I haven't illegally detained or questioned anyone because I am a lawful person."

Media Watch tried to speak with the prosecutor who reportedly questioned Akhlaqi, but he declined to comment.

Akhlaqi's detention was in violation of the rule of law. Media Watch expresses concern over the rising number of journalists being detained or questioned by prosecutors without a referral from the Commission on Media Violations. The Attorney's General's Office, as an institution promoting the rule of law, should not act outside the law or abuse its judicial authority.

### **Kabul Weekly closes due to financial problems**

Kabul Weekly Editor-in-Chief Faheem Dashty wrote in the newspaper's Nov. 26 edition that the paper is shutting down due to a lack of money. Kabul Weekly was among the first newspapers to begin publishing following the fall of the Taliban in 2001.

"Basically it was a financial problem," Dashty told Media Watch. "We tried to avoid this problem by reducing our expenses, which helped the paper survive for another six months, but this effort also failed to work and so the paper was closed down.

"Probably some political factors also helped in discouraging donor organizations to assist," he added.

Many print publications are struggling to survive.

The Killid Group Executive Director Aziz Hakimi said Killid and Mursal magazines also face serious financial challenges, but the organization is working to prevent their closure.

"Our aim has been to provide readers with necessary information, but lack of funding jeopardizes the survival of the magazines," he said. "We are using different approaches to seek funding for the magazine, but how far we make it is not clear."

According to the Article 2 of the Media Law, the government must "promote and develop free, independent and pluralistic media."

When asked why the government has not done more to support independent media, Deputy Minister for Culture and Youth Affairs Mubarez Rashedi said: "Although we can't support the independent media financially, we have given full abstract support to them and we regret the closure of Kabul Weekly."

Afghanistan National Union of Journalists President Sayyid Hussain Fazil Sancharaki said publications that struggle will survive.

"After five years, only the publications that follow journalism standards and those that have gone through growing pains will survive," he said. "They will continue operating because of their passion for their work. They will carry the media light and light the way for others."

Media Watch recognizes the rapid growth and decline of the print press over the last five years. Several hundred publications are registered with the Ministry of Culture and Youth Affairs, though only a small percentage of papers are still in print. The two main reasons for the closure of so many newspapers has been a total dependency on foreign donors and a lack of government support to the independent media.

Media experts believe the best way to ensure the survival of print publications is to merge several publications under one name.

### **Abduction of German journalists denied by officials**

On Dec. 5, reports emerged that two German journalists were abducted on the Kandahar-Uruzgan highway. The alleged kidnappings were first reported by the Afghanistan NGO Safety Office. Afghan and German government officials denied the reports.

"The released report by ANSO about the abduction of two German journalists was absolutely incorrect and no German reporter has been abducted," said Tubis Isna, a German Embassy press office deputy.

ANSO officials later admitted that their organization made a mistake.

"Two French NGO workers, whose abduction had been planned, were stopped on the Kandahar highway," ANSO employee Ruhollah told Media Watch. "They were not reporters and our report was mistakenly released."

Media Watch again reminds the media and others not to release reports without confirming the accuracy of the information. In the rumor-rich context of Afghanistan, such reports can create confusion and fear among media workers.

### **Balkh province journalists protest proposed amendments to Media Law**

Journalists from Balkh province held a gathering on Dec. 7 to protest reported amendments to the Media Law, which is being reviewed by Parliament. According to Media Law experts and lobbyists, the proposed amendments would impose restrictions on the media.

"The National Union of Journalists expresses its concerns to the religious and cultural commission of the Lower House and asks the commission to approve the law without bringing any amendments," Arman-e Milli Editor-in-Chief Mir Haidar Mutahar said.

Media Watch believes that legislators must carefully review the Media Law, which was released by the Karzai Administration in December 2005. Any amendments should be in favor of freedom of the press and freedom of expression.

### **Kabul-based radio station organizes peaceful public protest**

Kabul citizens honked their horns on Dec. 13 in response to a campaign initiated by Radio Watandar, 87.5 FM. The "We Want Electricity" campaign was a form of public protest, according to station officials. The campaign marked the first time that an independent media outlet encouraged the public to engage in a peaceful protest to demand better public services.

"This was a good program because it turned the government's attention towards the problem," said Ghulam Ali, a Kabul taxi driver who had honked his horn in support of the campaign.

Radio Watandar officials said that lack of electricity has been among the chief complaints of its listeners since the station launched in October 2005. Kabul residents have limited access to public electricity in winter. Radio Watandar has a format where listeners leave messages with requests, comments and complaints on a range of issues.

"The radio station alerted its listeners that on Dec. 13, 2006, when they hear the sound of horns on the radio they should honk their car horns," said Radio Watandar owner Mirwais Social. "After the campaign, in which most drivers participated, electricity service improved in Kabul. I don't know if the impact was our radio campaign or not, but

I can say the improvement is declared simultaneously with our campaign and now the problem has been solved to some extent."

According to some anecdotal reports, police attempted to prevent drivers from honking. Kabul Police Department spokesman Fahim Kohdamani denied this.

"If such a thing took place during the campaign, it was only because of a lack of awareness on the part of some police," he said. "There were no orders from the police to stop the campaign."

### **Nai Journalism Training Radio begins trial broadcast**

Nai launched the country's first and only educational radio for media professionals on Dec. 25, 2006. The station, called Radio Nai ('reed flute') began broadcast on 94.5 FM in Kabul City.

The station's inaugural ceremony was attended by Nader Shah Aryan, the chairman of the frequency department of the Ministry of Communications, Sayyid Hussain Fazil Sancharaki, president of the Afghanistan National Union of Journalists and media professionals from a range of organizations.

In his opening remarks, Nai Executive Director A. Mujeeb Khalvatgar said that the radio would strive to provide professional trainings for journalists. Radio Nai will begin by broadcasting eight hours daily.

"The growth of TV and radio station is very beneficial for the country," said Aryan. "Before, journalists were only trained in the university and journalism courses, but this radio can train a large number of journalists at one time."

Sancharaki said he appreciated the creation of the station.

"As reporting and media work is a new phenomenon in Afghanistan and has yet to reach its place, therefore we must know better what responsibilities we have to our society and our profession," he said. "We must understand how to carry out our responsibilities in the fragile situation of our country. And it's good that Radio Nai has paid attention to this fact. Reporters can learn a lot by listening to this radio."

Radio Nai will act as a training platform for journalism trainees and educate the public and media workers about journalism ethics.

## **New Herat and Kabul TV stations launched**

A private television station called Hari TV has been launched in Herat city.

"Hari TV started its trial broadcast three months after its establishment," Hari TV Chairman Sayyid Najeeb Yousefi said in a speech during the station's inauguration. "The channel goes on air four hours every night, which includes political, cultural, social and other entertainment programs."

Herat's Department of Culture and Youth Affairs Director Wali Shah Bahra said he considers the establishment of private TV channels a cultural revolution. Two other private TV channels, Ghoryan and Saghar, exist in Herat province.

Meanwhile, a new TV station will be launched in Kabul City in March. Noorin TV will be available in Kabul only, but will expand to other cities, according to station officials.

"Noorin TV has been created by Hajji Mohammad Arif Noori, a Panjshiri businessman," said Noorin TV official Sayyid Halem Hashemi. "The station will try to cover Afghanistan's cultural issues."

Abdul Hamid Mubarez, a senior advisor to the Afghanistan National Union of Journalists, called the establishment of this channel an effective step.

"Afghan TV channels are becoming political, so cultural TVs are very much needed and the launch of Noorin TV is good news."

## **Badakhshan RTA reconstruction begins**

The construction work of Badakhshan RTA building, worth 900,000 afghanis began on Dec. 10. The former RTA building was destroyed in an electrical fire caused by poor wiring.

"The building contains 22 rooms, which will meet RTA's basic technical needs," said RTA Badakhshan Director Sayed Mahmood Jalali.

-----  
**For any queries or information please contact:**

[mediawatch@nai.org.af](mailto:mediawatch@nai.org.af)

Sididqullah Tauwhidi

Media Analyst

[sididqullahtauwhidia@internews.org](mailto:sididqullahtauwhidia@internews.org)

Mob: 009370279176

OR

Jawid Ahmad

Media Monitor and reporter

[jawid.ahmad@nai.org.af](mailto:jawid.ahmad@nai.org.af)

Mob: 0093799340831

The journalist can contact our Media Defense Lawyer, Mohammad Abdullah for any legal problem.

Mobile: 0093797192050

-----  
To obtain a soft copy of the report, please visit the following link: [www.nai.org.af](http://www.nai.org.af)

*Note: To maintain confidentiality and to protect sources it was not possible for Nai to corroborate the incidents by carrying out additional investigations.*

*None of the material herein may be reproduced without permission from Nai.*

*This newsletter was made possible through support provided by the office of the United States Agency for International Development through Counterpart International Inc, under the terms of award No. 306-A-00-05-00511-00.*

*The opinions expressed herein are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Agency for International Development and Counterpart International.*