

# Background



## Harassment of RFE/RL Correspondents in Uzbekistan Since May Events in Andijon – a Chronology

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- February 26, 2006 RFE/RL Uzbek Service correspondent Nosir Zokirov released from jail, after completing a six-month sentence that followed his conviction on charges of insulting a member of the Uzbek security forces [see entry for September 19, 2005].
- January 31, 2006 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, in a letter to RFE/RL Acting President Jeffrey N. Trimble, reaffirms its refusal to accredit the Uzbek Service's bureau in Tashkent and suspend the individual accreditations of four RFE/RL correspondents working for the Uzbek, Turkmen, Tajik and Kazakh Services.
- December 12, 2005 The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, in a letter to RFE/RL Acting President Jeffrey N. Trimble, refused to accredit the Uzbek Service's bureau in Tashkent and suspended the individual accreditations of four RFE/RL correspondents working for the Uzbek, Turkmen, Tajik and Kazakh Services. The letter was sent more than four months after the bureau's current license to operate expired on August 4, 2005. Under Uzbek law, to operate without a license from the Foreign Ministry is an offense punishable by fine or imprisonment.
- November 14 The Supreme Court of Uzbekistan convicts all 15 defendants in the Andijon trial on all charges, and sentences them to prison terms of from 14-20 years. During sentencing, Chief Judge Bakhtiyor Jamolov repeats allegations made about foreign media by prosecutors throughout the trial, stating that "They didn't write about real events, but disseminated biased information from those who they claimed were peaceful citizens demanding improved living conditions by protesting in the central square [of Andijon]. They also said that those people didn't have ties with religious extremists, and that the government troops opened fire on them. Thus, they distracted the attention of the world community."

- November 7 RFE/RL's Tashkent Bureau told by Uzbek Foreign Ministry press secretary Ilhom Zakirov that it will only be informed of the Uzbek government's decision on renewing the bureau's registration after the end of the trial of the 15 accused ringleaders of the Andijon uprising. Considered in the context of the campaign being conducted against RFE/RL's Uzbek Service and other foreign media during and in association with the trial, it is feared that the government may decide to reject the bureau's application for renewal.
- October 31 Uzbekistan's main television channel, UT-1 devoted a 25-minute edition of its "Munosabat" (Attitude) program to foreign media coverage of the Andijon uprising. Both of the guests on the program, Safar Ostonov, the editor-in-chief of the newspaper "Ozbekiston Ovozi" and political commentator Nasriddin Muhammadiyev, accused foreign media, including "BBC and Radio Liberty or some websites" of biased, incomplete coverage of the Andijon uprising; criticized them for describing those who fled the Andijon events to Kyrgyzstan as refugees; and asserted that they "tried to create a false picture [of the events] in the entire world."
- October 26 In his closing arguments at the trial of 15 accused ringleaders of the May12-13 Andijon uprising, Deputy Chief Prosecutor Anvar Nabiyeu again attacked foreign media, including Radio Liberty, the BBC, The Associated Press and the independent Russian website [www.ferghana.ru](http://www.ferghana.ru) of "broadcast[ing] lies to the whole world" (AFP).  
In spite of the many allegations made against foreign media by prosecutors, Uzbek authorities allow RFE/RL Uzbek Service Tashkent correspondent Sadriddin Ashurov to cover the entire trial. Ashurov files regular reports for the Uzbek Service on trial proceedings, which are broadcast daily and posted to the service's website, [www.ozodlik.org](http://www.ozodlik.org)
- October 26 The Uzbek-language newspaper "Hurriyat" in Tashkent carries an article entitled "Time doesn't belong to tyrants" by Tojiddin Razzoq, in which both Radio Liberty and the Voice of America are criticized for an "ideological attack" on Uzbekistan and Uzbek authorities are urged to "adequately respond to foreign radio stations" (translation by BBC Monitoring).  
The Uzbek-language newspaper "Xalq Sozi" in Tashkent carries an article entitled "Democracy has been sacrificed for the sake of interests," accuses foreign media of being deliberately unobjective and of knowing about the Andijon uprising ahead of time.
- October 26 The New York-based Committee to Protect Journalists, in a press release, "condemns the government harassment of foreign media in

Uzbekistan, which today prompted the BBC to close its Tashkent bureau." The release notes that "authorities have initiated a smear campaign in the state media accusing journalists from the BBC, Deutsche Welle, The Associated Press and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) of organizing 'information attacks' against Uzbekistan and trying to use the protest in Andijon to overthrow the government and establish an Islamic state."

- October 25 Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Fried, in testimony before the U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, cites the "jailing [of] an Uzbek RFE/RL reporter" as an example of how "Uzbekistan has taken numerous steps away from providing the freedom that is essential to long-term stability" since the May 12-13 Andijon uprising.
- October 20 Elmurod Yusupaliev, the RFE/RL Uzbek Service correspondent in the southern Kyrgyz city of Osh, tells supervisors that local journalists have told him that Uzbek security officers are offering them money to track Yusupaliev's movements, and that Kyrgyz police are investigating the harassment of Yusupaliev's intern, who was taken from the area around Yusupaliev's office and beaten by three Uzbek men who called themselves local police officers.
- October 12 The Uzbek-language newspaper "Hurriyat" in Tashkent carries an article entitled "Why are 'democrats' drawing their swords?" by commentator Botirjon Gafurov, in which "Radio Liberty" (RFE/RL's Uzbek Service), the BBC, the "New York Times", the "Times" of London, the Associated Press and Reuters news services "and some other media outlets" are accused of carrying out an "information attack" on Uzbekistan during the months since the "terrorist acts in Andijon." According to the article, this "information attack" is linked to "political pressure by international organizations such as the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, IWPR, the International Amnesty Committee" and "economic pressure [on the part of the U.S. government] by means of promising 200 million dollars to the Manas airbase in Kyrgyzstan in exchange for the 'Uzbek refugees' and by not paying the compensation for the use of the Xonobod airfield."
- October 7 Family members of jailed Uzbek Service correspondent Nosir Zokirov face additional harassment from Uzbek authorities. One of Zokirov's sons, Zohidjon Zokirov was arrested near the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border while traveling from Namangan to a training session in Kyrgyzstan that had been organized by human rights groups. Zokirov is accused of attempting to cross the Uzbek border illegally

and held in jail for three days, then fined \$1,000 (avg. monthly per capital income in Uzbekistan is \$150) and released. Zohidjon Zokirov now faces a hearing on November 7 in relation to this case.

- September 27 Prosecutors have threatened to file new criminal charges against jailed Namangan-based Uzbek Service correspondent Nosir Zokirov, this time for "insulting the President". Under Article 158 of the Criminal Code of Uzbekistan, Zokirov could be sentenced to between 3-5 years of imprisonment.
- September 20 In his opening statement on the first day of the trial of 15 defendants accused of instigating the May 12-13 uprising in Andijon, Deputy Chief Prosecutor Anvar Nabiyeu alleges that BBC correspondent Matluba Azamatova, Institute for War and Peace Reporting correspondent Galima Bukharbaeva, and RFE/RL correspondent Andrei Babitsky had advance knowledge of the violence about to break out in Andijon.
- September 19 Uzbek Service Tashkent correspondent Sadriddin Ashurov summoned to the Uzbek Foreign Ministry, where he was told that he will be one of a small number of reporters allowed to cover the trial of suspects accused of instigating the May 12-13 uprising in Andijon. The trial is scheduled to begin on September 20.
- September 19 The Appellate Court in Namangan rejected an appeal by Namangan-based Uzbek Service correspondent Nosir Zokirov and left standing a six-month prison sentence for insulting a member of Uzbekistan's security service [see entries for August 6 and August 26]. The panel of judges took 15 minutes to reach their decision, ignoring protests by Zokirov's defense counsel that the August 26 trial lacked legality on several counts, including the fact that defense witnesses were not heard and Zokirov had no legal representation.
- September 15 The Office of the General Prosecutor of Uzbekistan held a press conference in Tashkent, to announce the imminent start of the first trial of suspects accused in the mass unrest that preceded the killings in Andijon. During the press conference, Deputy Chief Prosecutor Anvar Nabiyeu accused RFE/RL and other western media, including the British Broadcasting Corporation, the Associated Press and Deutsche Welle of "continuing [an] information war against Uzbekistan which was launched in connection with the Andijon events" (ITAR-TASS) and compared foreign journalists to "hyenas and jackals searching for carrion" (AFP).

- September 7 The Uzbek-language newspaper "Namangan Haqiqati" in Namangan carries an article entitled "A sheep in wolf's clothing" by journalist Igor Reshetnikov, in which "Radio Liberty" (RFE/RL's Uzbek Service) is described as a "media that is close to the US intelligence service". The article questions the validity of claims of religious persecution by Uzbek refugees requesting asylum in Europe, who were interviewed by the Uzbek Service (translation by BBC Monitoring).
- September 1 Three NSS agents detained Uzbek Service correspondent Robia Mirzoalieva while she was conducting vox pop interviews on Temur Square in Tashkent at about noon. She was taken to a police station and questioned by the agents, who used abusive language, calling her a "filthy journalist" and "a little provocateur." They examined her recordings and threatened to jail her for five days. The SNB agents left after three hours, and Tashkent police officers took over the interrogation, which centered on her work for RFE/RL's Uzbek Service. She was released after being held for seven hours. Police officials confirmed her detention to RFE/RL staff but gave no reason for Mirzoalieva's detention.
- August 26 Namangan-based Uzbek Service correspondent Nosir Zokirov sentenced to 6 months in jail on charges of insulting a member of Uzbekistan's security service [see entry for August 6], following a hearing that took place without the presence of defense counsel or the examination of witnesses. Zokirov is taken directly to prison from the courtroom.
- August 26 The main Uzbek-language daily newspaper, "Xalq Sozi" in Tashkent, carries a 1,400 word article entitled "Willpower is being tested" that asserts that young Uzbeks need to be educated and employed "in order to prevent our clever young people from forgetting their motherland... and becoming zombies and spreading lies about and slandering our country in the media sources like the BBC and Radio Liberty" (translation by BBC Monitoring).
- August 20 The Russian-language newspaper "Turkiston" in Tashkent carries an approximately 600-word article entitled "Look at yourself first...", criticizing independent journalist Bobomurad Abdullayev (identified as a "Radio Liberty correspondent") for his "sheep" comment on an Uzbek service program: "...If a person calls people or someone sheep they should be responded appropriately. I often listen to the Radio Liberty's 'Forum' programme. Every broadcast is full of slander. The reports are groundless and make no sense at all"

(translation by BBC Monitoring").

The Uzbek-language newspaper "Namangan Haqiqati" in Namangan carries an article entitled "It cannot be justified" by journalist Faruh Azimov, in which both "Radio Liberty" (RFE/RL's Uzbek Service) and the BBC are accused of unbalanced reporting and of "danc[ing] to the tune of their clients" (translation by BBC Monitoring).

- August 17 The Uzbek-language newspaper "Mahalla" in Tashkent carries a 1,400-word article entitled: "Duplicity or about the ones who never ever become a human being," criticizing independent journalist Bobomurad Abdullayev for "duplicity." Abdullayev is identified in the article as "Radio Liberty's Uzbek correspondent;" although he worked with the service until 2001, he is no longer a correspondent for RFE/RL.
- August 16 The Russian newspaper "Nezavisimaya Gazeta" reports on the "public trial" of independent journalist Bobomurad Abdullayev, who was accused by his neighbors in the Turkmachi community of calling his fellow citizens "sheep" (citing a similar quotation in a speech by President Karimov) during a program aired by RFE/RL's Uzbek Service. The "public trial" decides Abdullayev should be punished for his remark by having him relocated to a different area of Tashkent. According to "Nezavisimaya Gazeta," "Although the decisions of public courts have no legal power and are merely of educational and advisory character, in most cases their recommendations are fulfilled. Therefore, it cannot be ruled out that the journalist's mini-deportation will take place in the immediate future" (translation by BBC Monitoring).
- August 7 Gulasal Kamolova, an Uzbek Service correspondent based in Bukhara, while traveling to Tashkent by train to collect her salary, is summoned to the conductor's coupe, locked in with three men who identified themselves as NSS officers, and questioned about the purpose of her trip. Kamolova is released after some time, but summoned again 10 minutes later and the process repeated. The men took note of her passport and ID numbers and said they will contact her again.
- August 7 Husniddin Kutbidinov, an Uzbek Service correspondent based in Tashkent, reports to RFE/RL managers that he receives threatening phone calls on a daily basis.
- August 6 Namangan-based Uzbek Service correspondent Nosir Zokirov calls a regional NSS official to complain about harassment suffered by

- local poet Khaidarali Komilov, who was being pressured to renounce an interview conducted by Zokirov in early June during which a poem by Komilov about the events in Andijon was read. The call leads to charges being filed against Zokirov for violating Article 140 of the Uzbek criminal code, which makes it a criminal offense to insult a member of the security forces.
- August 1-2 Uzbek Service correspondent Gofurjon Yoldoshev, now based in Tashkent, makes a private trip to his house in Andijon. He is visited by the head of the Mahalla (local council) who tells him his house is under surveillance and that she is under orders to report to the NSS any news of Yoldoshev's movements or those of his close family and relatives.
- July 24, 26 Two separate articles on the Russian-language [Centrasia.ru](http://Centrasia.ru) website attack then-Uzbek Service Director Adolat Najimova, referring to previous critical publications about her in Uzbek media and announcing that she has been fired from her position. The official announcement at RFE/RL that Najimova was being transferred to other duties at RFE/RL came on July 25.
- July 18 Kyrgyz journalism student Erkin Yakubjanov is arrested at Kyrgyz-Uzbek border at Dustlik and held until August 1, after requesting an interview with border guards. A freelance journalist with the Institute for War and Peace Reporting and on assignment for the radio network "Dolina Mira", Yakubjanov was arrested in part because of suspicions "he worked for the Uzbek service of Radio Ozodlik/Radio Free Europe," according to a [Reporters Without Borders](#) release.
- July 5 The house of Guliston-based Uzbek Service correspondent Lobar Qaynarova is searched by security officers; some Islamic literature is confiscated and Qaynarova's husband is told he may face charges of membership in a banned Islamic group.
- July 1 Lobar Qaynarova, an Uzbek Service correspondent based in Guliston, in the Syrdarya region near Tashkent, was attacked outside her apartment and beaten (see July 5 [RFE/RL Press Release](#)). Qaynarova, in the first trimester of pregnancy, is hospitalized with cracked ribs and injuries to her face and abdomen. She was returning home from court, where she had been covering a trial. Her assailants took Qaynarova's recording equipment and minidisks of the trial proceedings.
- June 26 Uzbek Service correspondent Gofurjon Yoldoshev travels secretly

from Tashkent to Andijon to attend a meeting of human rights activists in a tea-house. The tea-house was raided and Yoldoshev is arrested with four others. They were told to stop their activities and held for four hours before being released. Yoldoshev's recording equipment is again confiscated.

- June 17 Namangan-based Uzbek Service correspondent Nosir Zokirov is taken at night to the local police department and interrogated about a June 13 report for RFE/RL that contained a poem criticizing Uzbek President Islam Karimov. Zokirov was released after several hours and allowed to return home. During the following week, Zokirov is summoned by the police again several times for further interrogation.
- A local Namangan newspaper had previously published a threatening article about Zokirov, charging he had spread disinformation about the events in Andijon. Local media continue to publish invective about him.
- June 16-17 Uzbek Service correspondent Gofurjon Yoldoshev's neighbors are questioned about his whereabouts.
- June 10 The "Zerkalo XXI" article appears, with identical commentary, on two independent and reputable Russian-language websites that deal with Uzbek issues -- [Arena](http://www.freeuz.org) (www.freeuz.org) and [Ferghana.ru](http://Ferghana.ru). One of the assertions made in the online commentaries is that articles such as "So Many Lies..." are brought to editorial offices in Uzbekistan by NSS officers and "no editor can refuse to publish."
- June 9 An article attacking RFE/RL Uzbek-language broadcasting that first appeared in the Uzbek-language newspaper "Mahalla" in late May, is reprinted in the June 9 edition of the Russian-language newspaper "Zerkalo XXI" (Mirror of the 21st Century), published in Tashkent. Translated excerpts are available on request.
- June 6 Uzbek Service correspondent Gofurjon Yoldoshev's 17-year-old daughter, Khosiyat, a student at Andijon State University, is taken to a staff room and questioned by three unknown people about her father.
- May 29 Yoldoshev calls RFE/RL managers and reports that his guide to the mass gravesites, a community elder named Juraboy, had been stabbed to death. Managers ask Yoldoshev to leave Andijon immediately, for reasons of physical safety; within 2 days, Yoldoshev moves to Tashkent with his family.



- May 28                    Andijon-based Uzbek Service correspondent Gofurjon Yoldoshev is led to mass graves in Andijon (see May 30 [RFE/RL Press Release](#)).
- May 26-27                An article in the Uzbek-language newspaper "Mahalla" (Neighborhood), published in Tashkent, runs a lengthy article with the headline, "So Many Lies..." The article is an attack on RFE/RL Uzbek-language broadcasting and, specifically, on several members of RFE/RL's Uzbek Service based in both Prague and Uzbekistan who are identified in the article by name. A large section of the article attacked the performance and reputation of then-Uzbek Service Director Adolat Najimova.
- May 21                    Andijon-based Uzbek Service correspondent Gofurjon Yoldoshev traveled from Andijon to the nearby town of Qorasuv, to cover the second day of protests there. After he was seen recording interviews with several of the protesters, Yoldoshev was surrounded by at least eight men in civilian clothes who took him to a vacant courtyard nearby, kicked him several times, searched his bag, and removed the memory card from his digital camera and the minidisc from his audio recorder. Yoldoshev protested, identifying himself as the correspondent of RFE/RL, an American radio station. One person from the group introduced himself as an NSS officer and ordered Yoldoshev to leave immediately, saying his life could be at risk and his security will not be guaranteed. Yoldoshev said he is a resident in the region, but was told he is in a border region and violating regulations.
- May 20                    Mehribon Bekieva, the Uzbek Service's correspondent in Urgench (a town in the Khorazm region bordering with Turkmenistan) was visited in her office by an Uzbek National Security Service (NSS) officer, who "recommended" that she stop reporting about police abuses. She was told that, if she continued such reporting, her family could be negatively affected.
- May 17-18                Andijon-based Uzbek Service correspondent Gofurjon Yoldoshev travels from Prague to Andijon with Russian Service correspondent Andrei Babitsky, arriving in the city on May 15. The two correspondents stay in Yoldoshev's apartment. On the evening of May 17, as they are leaving the apartment, they are detained by two armed men wearing bulletproof vests, searched and forced to lie on the ground motionless for more than half an hour. Then, at gunpoint, the two were taken back to Yoldoshev's apartment, where he resided with his family. Babitsky was ordered to leave Andijon first thing in the morning on May 18.

- May 17            The adult son of Namangan-based Uzbek Service correspondent Nosir Zokirov is briefly detained and accused of inciting protests and organizing unlawful groups in Namangan. After Zokirov demanded an official explanation, his son, a member of a local human rights group, was released. Both the home and mobile phones of the correspondent were cut off; a person at the local cell phone provider told Zokirov that an order had been received to shut off his mobile phone.
- May 14            Two Tashkent-based RFE/RL correspondents -- Sadriddin Ashurov of the Uzbek Service and Mirasror Akhorov of the Tajik Service -- are ordered to leave the city, along with all other foreign correspondents, by security forces. Ashurov and Akhorov had been in Andijon for less than 24 hours.
- May 12-13        Mass unrest breaks out in Andijon, which is violently suppressed by Uzbek government forces. The Uzbek government later announces that 169 people, mainly militants, were killed in the violence; rights activists say that hundreds of people were killed by Uzbek soldiers.