

Media Reflects Sharp Political Divisions

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In the escalating confrontation between the authorities and the opposition in Kyrgyzstan, both sides are using the media as one of their main political tools. NBCentralAsia observers say reporting is becoming so biased that it threatens to aggravate the situation further.

Ahead of the open-ended opposition demonstration on April 11 to demand an early presidential election, most of the leading media outlets have divided into those that support the opposition and those that back the authorities. Each outlet that has taken sides is in turn being criticised by either the authorities or the opposition.

On April 8, the opposition United Front for a Worthy Future for Kyrgyzstan and the Movement for Reforms announced that they would not give interviews or any other kind of information to two television channels, Channel Five and the National Channel, KTR, alleging that their coverage of political events was one-sided.

On March 31, copies of Agym, the most popular opposition newspaper, were publicly burned at a pro-government rally in the southern city of Osh.

Most media outlets in Kyrgyzstan are backed by politicians with particular political leanings, says Toktogul Kakchekeev, spokesman for the prosecutor general's office.

"A newspaper's owner determines its editorial policy," he said. "Take Agym, for example. It is owned by the active opposition member Melis Eshimkanov. So it is totally against the authorities."

The polarisation of opinion among journalists has resulted in a situation where readers are forced to change the way they look for information, according to Marat Tokoev, head of the Journalists' Association.

"Our readers have got used to the fact that it's impossible to form an opinion after having read one or even two newspapers. One has to read at least three or four different publications to be able to make an objective analysis, because our media is so one-sided," he said.

Tokoev added that as the tension mounts, journalists are becoming excessively politicised, and this is an obstacle to objective reporting.

Aziza Abdrasulova, head of Kylym Shamy, a non-government group, says the media have a huge impact on public opinion, and if they take sides it may contribute to greater instability.

(News Briefing Central Asia draws comment and analysis from a broad range of political observers across the region.)

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