

Rare Strike Prompted Minister's Sacking

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The dismissal of Turkmen textile minister Dortguly Aidogdiev in May appears to have been prompted by a strike by workers in the sector.

Aidogdiev was officially sacked because of "serious flaws in his work and abuse of office". As is commonly the case, President Saparmurad Niazov listed the disgraced minister's alleged sins at a cabinet meeting on May 16.

It all sounded like the standard set of accusations leveled at officials who fall out of favour. But in this case it seemed that chronic financial mismanagement caused a rare outbreak of industrial unrest that prompted Turkmenbashi to act.

In the Ahal region, anger over wages that had gone unpaid for months drove workers at four cotton-processing plants in the Kaakhka district, about 100 kilometres from the capital Ashgabat, to go on strike on May 15, the day before Aidogdiev's dismissal. The strikers held a demonstration in the central square of the town of Kaakhka to make their concerns heard. There were no precise numbers of the number of people involved, but participants suggested that about half the workforce came out.

One of those who took part said the workforce had acted out of desperation, because the wage arrears compounded already tough working conditions, and they felt they had no other options left. Another man said he was aware that they could be sacked as punishment for their action.

In Lebap region, the prosecutor's office in Turkmenabat has found substantial mismanagement in the textile industry in the course of a national-level investigation ordered after Aidogdiev's removal.

Prosecutors allege that factories in the city ran a double-accounting system so that it looked as though workers were being paid regularly when in fact wages remained unpaid for months. A prosecution service officer who asked not to be named said that the accounts indicated a successful operation, while in reality wages were five months in arrears. And managers were forcing staff to work weekends without extra pay.

A staff member at a silk factory in Turkmenabat said the ministry was fully aware of the situation because it had commissioned the false accounting itself.

The investigation into the textile industry appears to have had one positive outcome – managers have started paying out some of the back wages. But in Kaakhka, the national security ministry has reportedly been instructed to find out who was behind the strike.

Focus: [Turkmenistan: Inside View](#)

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