

Uzbek-Language Education Declines in Tajikistan

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Ethnic Uzbeks living in western Tajikistan say opportunities to be taught in their own language have been dramatically curtailed.

Uzbeks are Tajikistan's largest minority, accounting for about a seventh of the population according to the 2010 census.

In Tursunzade, a major town in the west of the country, IWPR heard complaints that five years ago, 80 per cent of classes were taught in Uzbek and 20 per cent in Tajik. Now it is the other way round.

Even where Uzbek is the teaching medium, pupils say they are not issued with books and have to buy them themselves.

In the Soviet era, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan would simply send textbooks in the right language to schools attended by the Uzbek and Tajik minorities in the other country. That no longer happens as relations between the two post-Soviet states are difficult, and neither government would want to be seen importing material that reflected the other's version of history.

One reason for the decline cited by local teachers and analysts is that there are no higher education courses turning out Uzbek-language specialists within Tajikistan. As a result, there are not enough school places for all applicants.

In some cases, Uzbek parents may prefer to send their children to schools that use Tajik or Russian as the main language of teaching.

Fluency in Tajik will allow children to get on in the country, especially in light of recent legislation making it more of a requirement to use Tajik in public life. Officials insist this is an inevitable consequence of living on this side of the border. A knowledge of Russian, meanwhile, offers career access to the wider former Soviet Union.

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