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<http://www.rsf.org/azerbaidjan-nakhchivan-authorities-continue-to-03-08-2011,40668.html>

Europe & ex-USSR - Azerbaijan

Electric situation

Nakhchivan authorities continue to harass IRFS correspondent

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Hakimeldostu Mehdiyev, the correspondent of the *Institute for Reporter Freedom and Safety* (IRFS) in Sharur, in the north of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, has been charged by the district prosecutor's office with "diverting electricity" under article 189-1 of the criminal code.

Sanan Pashayev, the official in charge of the investigation, made Mehdiyev signed an undertaking that he would not leave the Sharur district. The charge carries a maximum fine of 3,000 manat (2,600 euros), which could be withdrawn from his salary over a period of up to two years.

"We again call on the authorities to abandon these absurd proceedings, the sole aim of which is to intimidate Mehdiyev," Reporters Without Borders said.

Mehdiyev, whose power supply is still disconnected, has been harassed by the regional authorities every since early July, when he accompanied a visiting German journalist, **Michael Ludwig**. Nakhchivan is an autonomous Azerbaijani exclave located between Armenia and Iran.

20.07.2011-Journalist hounded in autonomous republic, two colleagues attacked

Reporters Without Borders is appalled to learn that **Hakimeldostu Mehdiyev**, a correspondent of the *Institute for Reporters Freedom and Safety* (IRFS) in the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, has repeatedly been harassed by officials for the past week. It is the latest example of the intolerance that the local authorities show towards the media in Nakhchivan, an Azerbaijani exclave between Armenia and Iran.

"This harassment of Mehdiyev on the most ridiculous pretexts must stop at once, and the physical violence used against two of his fellow journalists must not go unpunished," Reporters Without Borders said. "Attacks on journalists are unfortunately common in Nakhchivan, where the authorities like to foster a climate of tension that is very hostile to media freedom."



Mehdiyev lives in Jalil, a village near the city of Sharur in northwestern Nakhchivan, and runs a small car-wash next to his house as an additional source of income. On the evening of 15 July, he received a visit from a group of police officers and men in plain-clothes led by Aladdin Mamedov, the deputy head of the Sharur regional government, who said they had come to disconnect the electricity supply to the car-wash on the grounds that it constituted "illegal use of energy."

Two colleagues of Mehdiyev, **Elman Abasov** of *IRFS* and **Ilgar Nasibov** of the *Turan* news agency, were violently attacked by policemen when they tried to film the scene. Their equipment was confiscated and they were taken to a police station, where they were held for several hours. All three journalists filed a complaint with the regional prosecutor's office on 18 July.

The harassment of Mehdiyev nonetheless continued. The electricity supply to his house was disconnected. And then, on 19 July, he was summoned by the local prosecutor, who threatened to arrest his son if he did not withdraw the complaint.

According to Mehdiyev, who has been harassed in the past, he is being hounded now because he accompanied **Michael Ludwig**, a journalist with the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, during an abortive reporting visit to Nakhchivan in early July.

When Ludwig arrived in Nakhchivan with press accreditation from the Azerbaijani foreign ministry, the local authorities initially refused to let him work. Then, after long negotiations, they allowed him freedom of movement as long as he was always accompanied by a representative of the Nakhchivan government.

Everything Ludwig did was reported back to the local authorities by this official, who made it impossible for him to interview members of the local population freely. Ludwig finally left without getting the story he was after.

What with physical attacks on journalists and frequent blocking of Internet connections, the media freedom situation is appalling in Nakhchivan and the local authorities are largely to blame. But, far from trying to rein them in, the Azerbaijani government in Baku seems to be taking a leaf from their book. Violence against journalists has resumed throughout Azerbaijan since a crackdown on a peaceful protests in March and April.

There have been no results in the investigations into two cases in which opposition newspaper reporters **Seymour Khaziyev** and **Ramin Deco** were abducted and beaten in separate incidents a week apart in late March and early April.