

Kyrgyz News Website Could Face Charges for Report on Terrorism

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An independent Kyrgyz news website has been blocked in Kazakhstan and its management could face prosecution at home after publishing a report about Kazakh children training to fight for the Islamic State, EurasiaNet reported Wednesday.

The news section of the website that has come under fire, Kloop.kg, has reportedly not been accessible in Kazakhstan since 12:30 Moscow time on Wednesday.

The trouble began on Monday, after the website published a story about an Islamic State propaganda video featuring children soldiers from Kazakhstan. Almost immediately, Kloop.kg received an order from Kazakh authorities demanding that the story be removed from the website, EurasiaNet reported.

A government agency that identified itself as the "Computer Emergency Response Team" warned the website that it was violating not only laws in Kazakhstan but also international laws. The agency's message, which was posted online by Kloop.kg, said the story on the Islamic State could be considered an appeal to terrorism.

Bektur Iskender, the founder of Kloop.kg, responded to the authorities' warnings by arguing that the news site's story did not promote terrorism and was not subject to Kazakh law, but the website was soon blocked in Kazakhstan.

The Kyrgyz Interior Ministry has apparently followed Kazakhstan's example, however, having threatened to prosecute media outlets that publish material inciting or justifying terrorist activity in a statement published Tuesday.

The ministry said information about the current incident will be sent to the prosecutor's office to decide on whether or not charges will be filed. Those found guilty of inciting terrorism through media outlets can face up to five years in prison under Kyrgyz law.

"We will not give in and we will under no circumstances delete the material," Iskender wrote on his Facebook page on Wednesday.

Kazakhstan currently ranks 161st out of 180 countries in Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index. Kyrgyzstan and Russia rank 97th and 148th, respectively.

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