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Pamiris

Profile

Pamiris are considered 'Tajik' by the authorities in Dushanbe, but they are widely considered to constitute a separate ethnic group, differing from Tajiks in terms of language, religion and culture. Pamiri languages are a Southeastern branch of the Iranian language family. Additionally, while most Tajiks are Sunni, Pamiris are followers of the Ismaili branch of Shia Islam. They refer to themselves as Badakhshani or Pomir in their own languages. Because none of the Pamir languages are written, Pamiris use Tajik in many aspects of daily life.

Pamiris live mainly in the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Province, a mountainous region to the east of the country, and are divided into several linguistic groups: Shughnanis and Wakhi in the western and central parts of the province, and Darwazi and Yazgulami in the north.

Historical context

The Pamiris have for much of their history been isolated due to the extreme geographic remoteness of the mountainous region of the Pamirs which they have inhabited for many hundreds of years. During the late 1980s a separatist movement emerged. A Pamiri nationalist party, Lali Badakhshan, gained control in Gorno-Badakhshan after 1991. There followed anti-government protests in the province, followed a declaration of independence in 1992, though this was subsequently revoked. Pamiris were massacred during the civil war, especially in the Dushanbe and in western parts of the country, apparently because they were perceived as largely having backed the United Tajik Opposition.

In 1993 the government introduced certain reconciliatory policies, having signed an agreement with the Gorno-Badakhshani authorities. Nevertheless, the government afterwards imposed an economic blockade on Badakhshan and carried out punitive expeditions and detentions of local leaders. In response, 'self-defence' paramilitary units, linked to the local authorities and the opposition across the border, began to emerge.

Gorno-Badakhshan was the main scene of military operations in 1994 and 1995, with opposition attacks provoked by the increasing government military presence in Tawildara. After 1993, although officially a part of Tajikistan, Gorno-Badakhshan became a de facto self-ruled breakaway area. The main source of external support has been coming to Pamiris from the Aga Khan Foundation.

Current issues

The Pamiris' effective control of the Gorno-Badakhshan province has provided a degree of enshrinement of their rights and much more significant presence in public life and political participation than available to other minorities. The situation remains however tense, as there are still some active guerrilla Pamiri groups intent on gaining more extensive autonomy powers. At the same time, the vagueness of the Constitution and the President's power to appoint the Chair of the Gorno-Badakhshan assembly and the province's judges are being used to increase the control of central authorities to circumvent some of the province's autonomy.

Outside of the Gorno-Badakhshan province, Pamiris complain of continued discrimination, are largely excluded from exercising any significant political influence or participation in public life. There are continuing indications of threats

and some violence against Pamiris by ethnic Tajiks in Dushanbe, though these had diminished greatly by 2007.

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