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Investigate Uzbekistan Deaths, Serious Injuries in Custody

In Separate Incidents, Two Men Died in Prison, One Left Unresponsive
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Mihra Rittmann

Senior Researcher, Central Asia

[X@mihrarittmann](#)

Two men died in custody in Uzbekistan in recent days, and a third man is in the hospital unresponsive after police detained him, according to rights groups and local bloggers.

Abdurakhmon Tashanov, head of the human rights organization

Ezgulik, reported that Muhammadkadir Pulatov, 21, died on February 14, 2025, in central Uzbekistan's Almalyk prison. According to the Prosecutor General's Office, he died of a heart attack and acute

pancreatitis. But Pulatov's mother said she doubts the official version, explaining she saw her healthy son just two weeks prior. The prosecutor's statement notes "the Tashkent Special Prosecutor's Office is conducting a pre-investigation."

In a February 16 YouTube video, a local blogger reported that a young barber, apparently in good health, was detained at his workplace in Samarkand city by police on February 13. His mother in the video said she called her son on his mobile phone, but police answered and told her to go to the hospital. She found him there, unconscious. Police apparently gave her no information as to what happened.

On February 18, Vitaliy Ponamarev, a Russian human rights defender and Central Asia expert, reported that an imprisoned blogger named Mustafa Tursynbaev, from Uzbekistan's autonomous state of Karakalpakstan, died on February 16. According to the Prosecutor General's Office, Tursynbaev died in a Tashkent hospital days after part of a wall collapsed on him at a construction site, where he was working as



An empty courtroom in Tashkent, Uzbekistan's capital.

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a prisoner. The prosecutor's statement notes "the Tashkent Special Prosecutor's Office is currently conducting an investigation."

The deaths of two men in prison and another lying unresponsive in a hospital having been detained by police is not just a tragedy. These incidents demand action by the Uzbekistan government.

International human rights law requires governments to ensure effective investigations into all deaths in custody, regardless of the presumed cause. Such investigations are essential for ascertaining the cause of death, identifying anyone responsible for the death, and holding them to account, especially given that responsibility for the health and safety of all detainees rests with the detaining authorities. These investigations also deter similar incidents in the future, ensuring the security of other prisoners.

Importantly, if the investigations into these three cases find that ill-treatment or torture contributed to or caused the deaths in custody or lead to the third man's unresponsiveness, the perpetrators must be held to account.

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