

# A Tale of Two Azerbaijanis

By Murad Gassanly

LONDON. March 25, 2013: Jeyhun Gubadov was eighteen when he died. Raised by his single mother Samira Gubatova in a small town of Khyrdalan near Azerbaijani capital Baku, Jeyhun was called up for compulsory military service in November 2012. On 8 January 2013 his body was returned to his family. Official cause of death – heart failure. His distraught mother insisted on opening the coffin and it soon became apparent that Jeyhun, who did not have any heart problems, was a victim of vicious abuse – his body carried signs of severe beatings.

Jeyhun's death sparked the first wave of protests that continue to rock Azerbaijan to this day. Abuse and bullying in the armed forces remain the focus of rising discontent. If the early tremors of the last two months are merely harbingers of a greater challenge to the rule of the Aliyev regime later in this presidential election year, then history will rightly mark the murder of eighteen year old conscript Ceyhun Gubadov as its catalyst.

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Jeyhun Gubadov with his mother on the day he joined the army

The other Azerbaijani I want to discuss is very much alive and well. Very well indeed. He is Yunis Abasov, twenty-nine year old son of Azerbaijani agriculture minister Ismet Abasov. I first heard of him living in London in 2009, when the scandal over the Donkey Bloggers case first blew up. Azerbaijani Ministry of Agriculture purchased two donkeys from Germany at a record price of \$41,000 each. In the ensuing furore over the arrest of Emin Milli and Adnan Hajizade the subject of their satirical video was understandably overlooked. But the symbolism of this example of systemic corruption cannot be overstated even now.

The Aliyev regime and its minions love London. This is their kind of place – friendly to dirty money. The families of Azerbaijani ministers have been coming here since 1990s, preferring to settle in the expensive and fashionable areas of Kensington and Chelsea, Hampstead and St John's Wood. Lately it is the new luxury developments in the East that attract their attentions. Hundreds of millions of dollars of Azerbaijani people's money had probably been sunk into London property market over the past 10-15 years.

Yunis Abasov, the son of Azerbaijani Agriculture Minister Ismet Abasov

On 1 September 2006 Jeyhun Gubadov was only twelve, living with his mother in the poverty of Khyrdalan, when Yunis Abasov purchased a massive luxury penthouse apartment, comprising two amalgamated suites, in London's Docklands. The price tag was £1.4 million (about \$2 million). It is worth considerably more now.

I theoretically allow for possibility that the then twenty two year old Yunis Abasov was a successful businessman in his own right, and his ability to purchase luxury apartments had nothing to do with his father being the Minister for one of the most disgustingly and destructively corrupt government departments in Azerbaijan. Yet despite my best efforts and considerable research I found no evidence of this in Britain or anywhere else. Yet there is plenty of evidence that Yunis owns properties in London and all over the world.

Yunis and his father are no exceptions – in fact their wealth and extravagance are probably modest by the standards of the Aliyev regime plutocracy. But I thought of Yunis when President Ilham Aliyev publicly reprimanded government ministers for their children's obnoxious behaviour. President Aliyev, of course, can hardly admonish others given his own track-record. In 2010 Washington Post had famously exposed his own "extravagant shopping spree" in Dubai – nine luxury mansions worth \$33 million. Fish rots from the head...

Docklands in London is Azerbaijani oligarchs' new favourite real estate hotspot

The tale of two Azerbaijanis – Jeyhun and Yunis – is a tale of modern-day Azerbaijan. It symbolises the sheer injustice of the current status quo. It highlights its human cost. It is by no means an exhaustive portrayal of Azerbaijani reality, but it is emblematic of the stupidity, brutality, greed and suffering that life under corrupt dictatorship breeds. And for me it's a call to arms (Azeri Report).

\* This article was originally published at Murad Gassanly's personal blog on March 25, 2013.