

Tajik Price Hikes Fuel Unrest Fear

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DUSHANBE, Tajikistan — Tajikistan's state electricity company said Tuesday that household tariffs will rise one-fifth in a move that opposition politicians say will foment discontent.

The Barki Tojik power company said that from April, electricity will be charged at 11 diram (\$0.02) per kilowatt hour.

World Bank advisers had earlier recommended increasing tariffs further.

The nation is plagued by chronic power shortages, which cause hardship in winter months and severely limit the country's economic development.

A large part of the country's electricity is used by state-owned Tajik Aluminum Company, whose revenue is believed to benefit President Emomali Rakhmon.

The opposition Islamic Revival Party said the government was failing to consider the population's welfare.

"Increasing prices for electricity by more than 20 percent will have a detrimental impact on

people's difficult living conditions," the party said.

Barki Tojik's spokesman Nozir Yedgori also said power-rationing is being tightened in the regions due to cold weather reducing the flow of rivers that power the main hydroelectric plants.

In October, the company said it would limit power supply to areas beyond the capital to between six and 10 hours daily.

Residents in many areas have reported only receiving up to five hours of electricity. That may drop further to as little as two hours daily over coming weeks.

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