

Tajik Opposition Leader Beaten as Election Looms

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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DUSHANBE — A leader of Tajikistan's largest opposition party, the Islamic Revival Party, or IRP, was severely beaten Friday evening in Dushanbe, a colleague said, in a sign of rising tensions ahead of presidential elections due in November.

The IRP is the only opposition party represented in the parliament of majority Muslim Tajikistan, an impoverished Central Asian country of 8 million, ruled for 20 years by President Imomali Rakhmon.

Tajikistan, the poorest of the 15 former Soviet republics, lies on a major transit route for Afghan drugs to Europe and Russia and remains volatile after a 1992-97 civil war in which Rakhmon's Moscow-backed secular government clashed with Islamist guerrillas.

"Several people attacked the deputy head of the IRP just outside his house. They beat him and kicked him, he was all covered in blood," said Khikmatullo Saifullozoda, another leading

IRP member.

Mukhamadal Khayit was taken to hospital after sustaining moderate to severe wounds, Saifullozoda added.

It was not immediately clear who was behind the attack or what the motives were, but Saifullozoda linked it to politics.

"The reason behind the beating is his active political activism, his civic opposition, his opposition to the current authorities," Saifullozoda said.

The IRP, which is campaigning for a bigger role for Islam in public life, has not yet named its candidate for the November ballot in which the 60-year-old incumbent Rakhmon is expected to seek a fresh term.

Critics accuse Rakhmon, a former head of a Soviet cotton farm, of clamping down on dissent. He defends his tactics by saying he wants to oppose radical Islam.

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