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Fearing Protests, Court Orders Gazprom to Write Off Chechnya's $135M Gas Debt

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A Chechen court has ordered Russian gas giant Gazprom to write off 9 billion rubles ($135.6 million) of gas debt in the restive North Caucasus republic this week after prosecutors warned of rising "social tensions."

Reports say that unpaid debts on utility bills are a widespread problem in Chechnya's capital of Grozny, with an estimated 35 percent of residents failing to pay their electricity bills, according to the mayor's office, which has led to more than a year of raids and mass blackouts. Gazprom said that the overall debt of Chechen gas consumers was 14.4 billion rubles as of Jan. 1, 2018.

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Chechen prosecutors said Wednesday that they were able to persuade Grozny's Zavodskoy

district court to rule that 9 billion rubles of the arrears were “unrecoverable.”

“The defendant’s claims for mass payments... created social tensions and could lead to protests,” the prosecutor’s office said in a statement published on its website.

Gazprom Mezhregiongaz Grozny, a subsidiary of state-run Gazprom, said it plans to appeal the court decision, Interfax reported Friday.

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