

## Electricity Issue in Tajikistan and How People Manage—

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by *Madina Rahkmanova*

This year the winter in Tajikistan started earlier than it usually does, and the expected problems with the electricity started as soon as we had the first snow. It is even more unfortunate due to the fact that there is construction on one of the hydropower stations. That requires lowering the water level in one of the main rivers of Tajikistan, which in its turn, feeds the main hydropower station of the country. For 2 days, the electricity in the whole country is going to be cut except for strategically and vitally important buildings and departments, such as hospitals and maternity houses.



Unfortunately, such electricity cuts take place every year. In Soviet times all the houses in Dushanbe were connected to central heating, whereas now, the central heating is provided to just a few apartment buildings in the capital. People are forced to use electrical heaters, which puts additional electrical loads on the power lines and transformers and eventually damages them cutting the electricity supply.

The gas supply has decreased too and is now supplied for around only two hours in the morning and two hours in the evening. Therefore, people are forced to be creative and find alternative ways of keeping themselves warm and cooking food.

People living in private houses have more heating options. They use mostly coal and firewood. But those living in apartments use a device that has become very popular. It is basically a small stove, which functions as a mini fireplace with a chimney. Some of such devices are adjusted for cooking food too.

In the Northern administrative center of Tajikistan, the city of Khujand, most people are forced to use their balconies where they build fires to cook food. Eye witnesses in Khujand say that it looks as if the whole city is set on fire—there is smoke coming from almost every balcony.

Most International organizations functioning in the country have generators in case of electricity cuts. So do some of businesses and nongovernmental departments that can afford the generators even though they are considered to be an expensive way of getting electricity.

With such an electricity supply situation in the country the prices for supplies like candles, kerosene lamps, stoves etc have dramatically increased.

Tajikistan is one of the leaders in the world of hydropower potential. But it uses only 5% of its potential. There are several hydropower projects being developed, but all of them require investments and time. Tajikistan also has great solar energy potential. Unfortunately this sphere of power engineering is not yet getting as much attention as it needs for it to be developed here. In the meantime, the Tajik people have conflicting feelings about the situation. They are doubtful regarding improvement and yet hopeful that hydropower projects will be carried out successfully. And that such big electricity cuts will not take place in future.

**Editor's note** – The construction on one of the hydropower stations (HPS The Sangtuda-1 station) has been completed and the station is back up and running though consistent power is still a challenge. Madina Rahkmanova and her family live in Dushanbe.

### More Photos of Dushanbe in Winter





**Madina Rahkmanova** is a former exchange student to Boulder who currently lives in Dushanbe with her husband and young daughter. We asked her to give us a little window on life in Dushanbe. The following is her article about some of the challenges faced around electricity distribution.