



TAJIKISTAN

Tajikistan Launches Giant Power Plant To Tackle Energy Problems

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By RFE/RL's Tajik Service

DUSHANBE -- Tajik President Emomali Rahmon has launched a new hydroelectric station that had been vehemently opposed for years by the late leader of neighboring Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov.

At a large ceremony on November 16 at the Roghun power plant, Rahmon pressed a red button to switch on the plant's first of six planned turbines.

Other top Tajik officials and foreign guests attended the ceremony in the Central Asian nation's south.

Dushanbe hopes the \$3.9 billion project built on the Vakhsh river will not only make the country energy self-sufficient, but plans to export some of its output to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Uzbekistan.

The project was launched in the late 1970s but halted after the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991.

Construction restarted in late October 2016, less than two months after the announced death of Karimov, the long-term president of neighboring Uzbekistan.

Karimov opposed the project, saying the dam would reduce water flows to Uzbekistan's cotton fields.

Last year, Tajikistan raised \$500 million from an inaugural international bond offering to help finance the construction, which is being carried out by an Italian company, Salini Impregilo.

Dushanbe hopes to generate money to finance further construction at the plant after it starts producing energy.

Filippo Menga, a lecturer on human geography at Britain's University of Reading, told RFE/RL on November 15 that the inauguration of the dam's first turbine is "only a first step of a construction process that will still take several years."

"And indeed, it is still unclear how the dam is going to be paid for and if construction works will ever come to an end, and this is something that with Roghun is always going to be an issue, given the turbulent story of the project and the many interruptions of construction works that it experienced in the past. The road is still long before the dam is going to generate vast amount of hydroelectricity and thus generate a profit," Menga said in an e-mail response.

In 2014, Human Rights Watch criticized the project, saying that many families residing in the Roghun dam area would be resettled as a result.

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