

---

## **ELECTRICITY CUTS ACROSS IRAQ MAKE LIFE UNBEARABLE IN SUMMER HEAT**

-

31.07.2018

---

Al Jazeera (31 July 2018)

by Arwa Ibrahim

Baghdad, Iraq - For Um Adil, the worst part about the chronic electricity cuts in Iraq is having to cope with relentless summer highs of 48 degrees Celsius under an aluminium roof, without a source of cool air.

The 42-year-old mother of four lives in Shawaka, a working-class neighbourhood in central Baghdad, and says that life has become increasingly difficult as summers become hotter, while the power supply in her home decreases.

"The worst part is the [summer] heat," says Um Adil, who explains that she only receives two to four hours of electricity a day.

"As soon as the electricity comes back, I switch on the air conditioner for my kids," she says, pointing towards an old air conditioner donated to her by a local charity.

Power shortages have become chronic in Iraq - a country wrecked by a series of conflicts that have devastated its infrastructure - forcing Iraqis to buy electricity from private entrepreneurs who run power generators that can be seen on most street corners.

The problem was exacerbated earlier this month after Iran stopped supplying electricity to Iraq because of unpaid bills. Protests over the shortages, lack of jobs and services and corruption have since rocked areas of southern Iraq, as well as parts of Baghdad.

*'Our lives are intolerable'*

While those who can afford it, pay an average of 125,00 dinars (approximately \$100) a month to make up for the cuts, for many poor and working-class Iraqis, buying electricity is not an option.

Um Adil, whose husband works as a labourer and earns 10,000 dinars (about \$8) a day, they have to make do with what is affordable: long hours with no electricity.

"The power cuts have completely burnt us out. Our lives are intolerable."

From her television to her fridge, Um Adil's electric appliances have become useless. "Sometimes, I even forget having them," she says.

"I can't use the fridge," she adds, opening its door to empty out some food that went bad overnight. "I have to make just enough food for a single meal, otherwise, it goes off," she adds.

Her washing machine is mostly used to store dirty clothes. She now uses a large aluminium container to wash her family's clothes.

The family's television set and her children's playstation are no exception, meaning the children spend most of their time outdoors.

"They [the kids] study and play outside," says Um Adil, handing her youngest daughter Rafal, 7, a ball to play with in the alleyway outside. "They are even afraid to come into the house [at night]. Sometimes we have to use torches."

But it is not just such inconveniences that make life for many Iraqis difficult. Chronic power shortages make Um Adil feel paralysed in the face of emergency situations and hopeless about a better future for her family.

"The other day my son fell ill. With the phone's battery uncharged, I couldn't call him [my husband] so I had to take my son to hospital alone," she says.

"I feel suffocated. They [the kids] keep asking if we're going to live like this forever," she adds.

"They want us to buy electricity from a generator, but we can't afford it."

### *'Good business'*

While power outages differ from one neighbourhood to the next - with some households receiving only four hours of electricity a day and others up to 20 - an alternative power supply is needed when the lights go off.

This has created a huge demand, making the ownership of private generators a very lucrative business.

"This sort of work is needed all the time, so it's a good business," says Rida Ibrahim, a 48-year-old employee at a privately-owned generator in Salhiyya, one of Baghdad's more wealthy neighbourhoods.

"As soon as the electricity goes off, the generators come on automatically," he adds.

Using up approximately 8,000 litres of fuel every four to five days, the generator provides 70 households - mostly of professionals and businessmen - with electricity.

According to Ibrahim, the generator provides between 500 and 600 amperes of electricity a month, with each ampere being sold at 25,000 dinars (about \$21).

That means, the owner of this specific generator - not the largest of its kind - could be making up to \$12,000 a month - significantly higher than the \$400 average salary a government employee

makes.

### *Weak infrastructure or corruption?*

As people have become increasingly frustrated with the situation, the wave of protests against corruption and power shortages that began on July 8 have continued, especially in Iraq's southern provinces.

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi responded to the protests by suspending the minister of electricity Qassem al-Fahdawi on Monday, declaring in a statement the move was "because of the deterioration in the electricity sector".

With Iraq looking into new sources for electricity, it may turn to Saudi Arabia which has agreed to build a solar power plant and sell electricity to Iraq for \$21 per megawatt-hour, or a quarter of what it paid Iran for the imports, Bloomberg reported on Sunday. Iraq's Ministry of Electricity spokesman Mussab Serri told Bloomberg the deal includes the building of 3,000-megawatt plant in Saudi Arabia within a year. The deal still must be approved by Iraqi authorities.

Kuwait has also stepped in, providing generators and fuel to help power plants operate.

According to Mushtaq al-Shimaly, head of the energy committee in Baghdad's provincial council, the problem of the power shortages is multifaceted but mainly caused by the country's weak infrastructure.

"The main problem lies in the weakness of the infrastructure which distributes the electricity," he says, explaining that some of the distribution points were built in the 1960s and 1970s and haven't been properly maintained or renewed.

Citing official figures, AFP news agency reported that Iraq has allocated at least \$40bn of its state budget to rebuild its power network.

But as the country still struggles to cope with electricity shortages, many Iraqis believe some of the funds have been mismanaged or embezzled.

Successive electricity ministers have been sacked over corruption or forced to quit in the face of angry protests.

### *Why are Iraqis protesting?*

According to Shimaly, if the allocated budget was properly used, Iraq's current production of electricity would have been enough.

"Our production [of electricity] should be sufficient for about 70 percent of Iraq's needs," says Shimaly.

"That should reduce the cuts to two hours after every four of electricity, which isn't ideal, but in our current situation [of the country coming out of war], is acceptable.

"But there isn't a genuine will in the ministry or the government to address the issue. If there was,

things would have been a lot different by now."

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/07/electricity-cuts-iraq-life-unbearable-summer-heat-180731111220743.html>

---

Kaynak/Source: