

Argentinean President Tries to Defend 400% Gas Hikes



Buenos Aires, August 4 (RHC)-- An Argentinean court is reviewing President Mauricio Macri's plans to increase gas prices, while demonstrators continue to protest other fare hikes. The austerity policies of the Argentinean president continued to come under fire as a court ordered the government to justify utility rate hikes that quadrupled gas prices.

The 80-page government report complies with a court order for information to weigh whether the gas hikes follows the principles for "gradual and progressive" implementation and price increases. The court ordered the report last month.

The spike in gas prices of up to 400 percent came as part of a broader campaign to increase the price of basic utilities, including increases in the cost of electricity by up to 700 percent.

The government argues that the skyrocketing gas bills do not constitute a comprehensive change in utilities rates, which would require a more thorough public review, but a "transitional adjustment," which can be directly implemented.

The dispute over the gas price hikes comes amid broader scrutiny of austerity policies. Last week, a city judge in Buenos Aires blocked plans to hike public transit fees in the capital city until the policies undergo a review. A subway ticket was set to increase to up to 7.5 pesos depending on the length of the journey,

but thanks to the injunction will stay at 4.5 pesos at least temporarily.

The skyrocketing prices of basic services come amid a wave of mass layoffs in which 179,000 people in the public and private sector lost their jobs while the country hit record levels of inflation in recent months.

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