

Bilawal inaugurates 660MW coal-based power plants

MITHI: Pakistan Peoples Party chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari on Wednesday inaugurated 660-megawatt power plants and the first open-pit coal mine in Thar that he said was set to brighten the entire country with its coal energy.

Praising the people of Thar, who worked day and night for the completion of the project, the PPP chairman said: "This is new Pakistan."

Mr Bhutto-Zardari announced setting up of a multi-disciplinary university as well as a campus of NED University of Engineering and Technology in Tharparkar and pledged provision of free electricity to the residents of Islamkot.

'This is new Pakistan,' says PPP chairman while announcing two universities for Thar, free power supply to Islamkot residents

He said the people of Thar had the first right to the electricity being produced with Thar coal. As under an agreement, the provincial government had no authority to provide electricity directly to the people of Thar, "I have directed the Sindh government to pay monthly electricity bills of domestic power consumers of Islamkot from its resources," the PPP chairman said. In the next phase, he added, a similar arrangement would be extended to other parts of Thar as well.

Mr Bhutto-Zardari said he inaugurated the power generation project on behalf of his mother, Benazir Bhutto, who had performed its groundbreaking. He said this was the same land that the PPP founder Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto had got vacated from India in 1973.

Mr Bhutto-Zardari said the completion of Thar coal-based power project was the manifestation of good governance and service delivery by the PPP government.

Terming it a historic day for Pakistan and his party, the PPP chairman said: "On April 10, Constitution Day is observed because on this day 1973 Constitution was framed, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto landed in Lahore on April 10, 1986 after ending her exile where she was received by three million people and it is again historic this year when we have inaugurated the first indigenous Thar coal-fired power plant."

He said Thar needed the most prestigious university. "On my directive Sindh Chief Minister has vowed to establish a campus of NED University in Thar in the first phase and then the campus would be made a full-fledged university," he said.

He recalled that Benazir Bhutto after coming into government had visited Thar along with then chief minister Syed Abdullah Shah and had performed groundbreaking of coal mining. "Today, I on behalf of Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, and on behalf of Syed Abdullah Shah, his son Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah, have inaugurated the Thar coal-fired power plant," he said.

He said the Thar power plant launch was not just the success of the PPP but of the entire country and its economy. “It is the success of the vision of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto,” he said.

Talking about the partnership of the Sindh government with M/S Engro, he said the vision of national development through public-private partnership was given by his mother. She gave the plan to involve industrialists, developers and investors for executing mega projects for the country’s development. “Learning from her vision, the Sindh government constructed roads, a bridge on the Indus and hospitals on the public-private partnership,” he said.

This governance model had been acknowledged by The Economist, a well-reputed international magazine that ranked Sindh at the sixth position in entire Asia, he said.

Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah said the power generation from Thar coal was as big an achievement as making Pakistan a nuclear power. “Mr Bhutto was the founder of our nuclear power [defence] and his daughter was the pioneer of Thar coal power,” he said.

He said Thar had changed the destiny of Pakistan by generating 660 megawatts from indigenous coal. He said it had been termed impossible and waste of money. The PPP government made it possible despite extreme opposition and discouragement, he said.

Mr Shah narrated the entire account how then president Asif Zardari had directed the Sindh government to constitute Sindh Energy Board which undertook the task of establishing coal mining on the basis of public-private partnership.

When the Sindh government started the coal mining project, the opponents used to say that there was no coal and whatever was available there had high sulphur ratio and termed it inferior for power generation. “Since we were committed with the vision of Ms Bhutto, therefore without taking a ‘U-turn’ we have implemented the project and today it is generating electricity,” said Mr Shah.

The chief minister said Thar coal power was the only mega project in the country where 71 per cent jobs had been given to locals, the people affected by the mining had been given houses besides Rs100,000 per annum for each family.

M Shah said 75 local engineers [of Thar] after receiving training from China returned to work on the mining and power plants.

He said the entire amount to be generated from the royalties of Thar coal mine and power projects would be given to Thar Foundation for local development. He also vowed to protect the rights of locals while developing other projects.

Energy Minister Imtiaz Shaikh lauded the efforts of Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah and former chief minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah.

Addressing the gathering, former chief minister Syed Qaim Ali Shah said that Thar coal power plant launch was a big success. He said that on the instruction of Ms Bhutto he had taken then president Farooq Leghari to Thar despite his reluctance to support the project and had showed him the coalfield.

Thar project key to Pakistan development

Consul General of China in Karachi Wang Yu said he was taking pride in attending the inauguration of the Thar-coal power plants which was among the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor projects. Of the six top projects, Thar coal-fired power plant was the most important in terms of its significance in the national uplift of Pakistan, the Chinese consul general said.

He said it was the first step to establish Thar coal-fired power plant. In the second phase, it would be expanded in terms of its capacity and power generation as Thar coal had the capacity to meet the entire electricity requirement of Pakistan.

Samad Dawood, vice chairman of Engro Corporation, said there was no country which had ever attained its development goals without tapping its indigenous energy sources. “In Thar, we have vast reserves of coal to meet the entire power requirement of the country,” he said.

SECMC chairman Khursheed Jamali said this was Pakistan’s only project which had been started at an estimated cost of \$854 million and completed at \$670. The money saved would be utilised for the expansion of the project to generate 4,000 megawatts, he added.

PPP lawmakers from Thar, Umerkot, Badin, Mirpurkhas as well as a large number of leaders and workers attended the ceremony.

Bilawal meets miners, affected families

Earlier, the PPP chairman visited New Senhri Dars village which has been established for 172 families affected by the coal mining.

He was briefed that 72 families comprising 500 members had already settled in the newly built houses while the vacant houses would be occupied by the allottees soon.

Later, Mr Bhutto-Zardari along with the CM, energy minister and SECMC chairman went 164-metre deep into the coal mine and met the miners working there.

Hanif Samoon