

Gas crisis deepens as govt investigates price hike issue

ISLAMABAD: As the government investigates gas price hike controversy, a serious shortage has hit the country with delay in the berthing of Q-flex cargo of Pakistan State Oil (PSO), affecting almost all sectors of economy.

“The situation is very serious. Gas supply to power plants, fertiliser plants, general industry and CNG sectors has already been curtailed and SNGPL is struggling to meet demand of residential and commercial consumers,” said a senior government official.

He explained that the SNGPL had reported about 400 million cubic feet per day of reduction in LNG supplies and the supply could go further down by Tuesday depending on weather conditions.

Delay in berthing of PSO consignment affects power, CNG and fertiliser sectors

While Prime Minister Imran Khan had called a meeting on the issue of gas prices controversy on Tuesday, followed by a meeting of the reconstituted Cabinet Committee on Energy (CCoE) on Wednesday, the situation could only worsen with bad weather conditions and ill-planned development of two terminals for regasification of imported Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG), the official said.

Sources said the larger Q-flex cargo of PSO could not be berthed due to high wind speed (beyond 18 knots) on Monday while a relatively smaller cargo of Pakistan LNG Limited (PLL) could also face problems if wind speed goes beyond 30 knots on Tuesday. “The weather condition is likely to turn severe on Tuesday and remain so until February 16,” said an official, adding that uncertainty surrounds immediate berthing of the two cargoes.

The official said the Sui Southern Gas Company Ltd (SSGCL) had reported that regasification rate at Engro terminal had dropped from 660mmcf to 220mmcf from Monday afternoon and about 420mmcf from Pakistan Gasport terminal which could drop to 220mmcf by Tuesday if PLL cargo failed to anchor at the port. “So the total supply to the SNGPL system will drop to 440mmcf from 1000mmcf and create a serious crisis, particularly in the Punjab.

Sources in the SNGPL confirmed to Dawn that the company had suspended supplies to three LNG-based power plants in the Punjab while it could discontinue the supply to fertiliser plants and CNG sectors. A notice issued to the CNG and other industries stated, “This is to inform that PSO cargo which was scheduled for berthing on Monday is not getting berthed due to high winds. Also, due to late berthing of LNG cargo at EETPL, regasification rates have been reduced significantly.” It further informed them that the company would be constrained to discontinue gas.

The petroleum division also confirmed that non-berthing of PSO cargo had reduced LNG regasification at Engro terminal. “Total RLNG available is 600mmcf at this time and the weather condition at port may become more severe by tomorrow and resultantly berthing of PLL upcoming cargo on Tuesday may get into difficulty,” the petroleum division said.

Under the circumstances, the ministry said the government power plants had been shut down along with other measures to ensure that domestic consumers faced minimum problems.

Separately, the power division said it faced temporary shortfall on Monday due to gas supply cut but the 800-megawatt shortfall was met from hydro sources as well as coal and other fuel based plants. “Only two to three hours temporary load management was carried out on Monday,” it said.

In a statement, the PSO explained it understood the situation being faced by SNGPL and its consumers due to weather problem. It said the LNG cargo reported in Pakistan as per stipulated time, but the delay in berthing due to weather was something that PSO did not have control over. “Port authorities will hopefully let the cargo berth on top priority as soon as weather is supportive”, the PSO said.

The Newspaper's Staff Reporter