

Our Correspondent

### **Sindh opposes KE tariff hike amid power cuts**

KARACHI: The Sindh government strongly opposed on Saturday the Economic Coordination Committee's (ECC's) decision to increase power tariff for K-Electric (KE) consumers by 22.5 per cent - Rs2.89 per unit of electricity - from July and demanded that the decision be withdrawn.

Denouncing the decision, Sindh Agriculture Minister Ismail Rahoo asked, "How can the Centre increase the rate of electricity without taking the Sindh government in confidence? The decision is akin to showing animosity towards Sindh."

He censured the federal government for the raise in the price instead of taking measures to put an end to "KE's injustice to the people of Karachi." He further questioned the rationale behind increasing electricity prices when KE - the sole electricity supplying body for Karachi - was carrying out prolonged load-shedding in most parts of the city on a daily basis.

Demanding that the ECC withdraw the decision, he warned that the Pakistan Peoples Party would otherwise take to the streets.

Separately, Sindh Education Minister Saeed Ghani also lambasted KE for failing to meet Karachi's electricity demands and slammed the federal government over the tariff hike.

Addressing a press conference, Ghani claimed that KE continued to exploit Karachiites while the city sizzled in extreme heat.

Pointing out that electricity was not a luxury, he called for nationalising KE and ensuring the restoration of electricity supply across Karachi.

On the other hand, despite the ruling party in the Centre maintaining its three-month-old decision to increase power tariff for KE consumers, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leadership in Karachi announced a sit-in to protest long hours of load-shedding in the metropolis, in a confusing move.

"People's lives have become difficult due to unannounced load-shedding by KE," remarked PTI leader Saeed Afridi on Saturday, while announcing the protest. He called for an end to excessive load-shedding and demanded that KE "stop its brutality and mentally torturing citizens."

A day earlier, Sindh Governor Imran Ismail and Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA) MPAs had held a meeting with KE representatives at the Governor House, with Federal Energy Minister Omar Ayub joining them via video-link.

It emerged on Saturday that GDA MPAs in the meeting called for an end to KE's monopoly and establishing more power distribution companies in Karachi.

Claiming that failure to address the city's electricity crisis or hold the power utility accountable could weaken the PTI-GDA coalition, they had criticised Ayub. They further demanded that Sindh's members in the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority be replaced and KE be brought under its umbrella.

In response, Ayub said that KE needed to ensure that it met the city's electricity demand and ordered the Hyderabad Electric Supply Company and Sukkur Electric Power Company to resolve issues pertaining to power supply in their respective areas within a week.

## Protests

Meanwhile, when half the port city plunged into darkness due to electricity suspension on Friday night, citizens took to streets to protest long hours of unannounced load-shedding in the city.

They staged a demonstration outside KE's office on Sharae Quaideen and shouted slogans, slamming the power utility.

The protesters decried being burdened by inflated electricity bills despite excessive load-shedding and pointed out that power outages were not just affecting students who were taking online classes due to a lockdown, but also added to the troubles of coronavirus patients.

They demanded that unannounced load-shedding should end immediately.

Separately, the residents of old city areas assembled outside KE's office near Makki Masjid and staged a sit-in. They, too, shouted slogans against KE and demanded the restoration of electricity supply.