

Businessmen lose patience on gas suspension, consider exit

KARACHI: Businessmen minced no words on Friday while asking the authorities to pull the plug on industries once and for all instead of giving intermittent shocks to them, as gas suspension together with power outages worsened their pain points.

"If the government has to create so much trouble through such anti-business policies then it should formally make an announcement that all the industrialists should immediately shut down their factories forever and go somewhere else," KCCI, a trade body with 55,000 members, said in a statement.

Sui Southern Gas Company announced suspension of gas supply to industrial consumers for three days to Sunday to provide additional fuel to K-Electric amid widening demand and supply gap of electricity.

"This would prove detrimental to the industries that are already in deep crises and at the verge of complete collapse due to negative impact of lockdown imposed since March," said the KCCI. "KE's additional gas requirement should be fulfilled either from RLNG (re-gasified liquefied natural gas) or any other means."

There are 16,000 industries operating in Karachi, while the government provides uninterrupted electricity and gas supply to only five export-oriented sectors, which hardly cover around 1,300 to 1,500 industries, according to the KCCI.

"Karachi chamber has always been raising its voice against the injustices being done to Karachi which, despite so many odds and challenges, continues to contribute more than 70 percent revenue to the national exchequer and it has always been the most important city and the hub of all the financial, commercial and industrial activities for the entire subcontinent even before the partition during British era," the KCCI said. "Karachi is being punished."

Industries are compelled to stay tangled in dealing with gas, electricity, infrastructure and other issues instead of exploring ways and means for trade expansion. "The gas and electricity crises if not addressed prudently would result in triggering social disorder hence the government must intervene to foil the anti-economy and anti-business agenda."

Suleman Chawla, president of SITE Association of Industry agreed that if the government wants to close the industries, "do tell us so that we ourselves close the industries".

"Needless to mention, the industries are already passing through crisis due to coronavirus. Closure of power and gas to industries will destroy them, which will result in more unemployment," Chawla said.

The decision of the federal government to close gas of general industries on Friday, Saturday and Sunday and to provide the same to K-Electric is in no way acceptable to industries, he said. "This is also not in the interest of national economy as suspension of core utilities, like electricity and gas have direct impact on production, which will ultimately result in fall of exports from Pakistan."

Chawla appealed the Prime Minister and Chief Minister Sindh to save industries from closure amid no electricity at night and no gas in daytime.

"This is sheer injustice with Karachi industries. In fact, the government should take a serious notice of prolonged load shedding in Karachi together with action against K-Electric for its inefficiency." The North Karachi Association of Trade and Industry (NKATI) also repeated the same question: "whether we shut down industries as there were repeated attempts to shut down the industries under various pretexts".

"The government must know that power outage is already hampering production activities. Shutting down of gas supply will completely stop the production process, which will have a very negative impact on the country's exports," said NKATI.

NKATI said K-Electric cuts off power to industries three to four days a week and has also announced an 8-hour shutdown of factories. Similarly, Sui Southern Gas Company has also announced to suspend gas supply to industries for three days a week. "If the supply of electricity and gas to industries is continuously cut off, it will become impossible for industries to function. It seems that industries are no longer the first priority of the government."