

CEO says in public hearing: 'KE cannot be blamed for Karachi loadshedding'

KARACHI: K-Electric chief executive Moonis Alvi has refused to accept responsibility for the power utility's role in the persistent loadshedding issues faced by Karachi, saying "KE cannot be blamed", and has instead faulted the federal government for delaying approval for import of oil.

A public hearing to discuss the longstanding loadshedding issues in Karachi, which have taken a turn for the worse this year, was held by the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (Nepra) in Islamabad on Friday.

A number of public representatives, technical experts, representatives of different entities, members of business community, journalists and the consumers of Karachi participated.

Nepra Chairman Tauseef H Farooqui presided over the hearing and members of Nepra from all the four provinces also participated. "We have gathered here today to discuss the issue of loadshedding in Karachi," said Nepra Vice Chairman Saifullah Chatha. "The authority will listen to all stakeholders present today."

K-Electric Chief Executive Moonis Alvi told Nepra that loadshedding in Karachi has experienced a rise since June 22. "Under normal circumstances, loadshedding in Karachi lasts between three to seven- and-a-half hours," the KE chief said.

Alvi said that Pakistan State Oil (PSO) had written to the federal government saying that the demand for furnace oil will not be met and had sought permission to import oil. He said that KE's plants ran out of oil and not only KE, but the government's thermal power plants also faced supply shortages. "PSO got permission to import oil for KE's power plants after much delay," Alvi said. The KE chief said that due to increased demand for electricity in the summer, loadshedding has to be done even in areas otherwise exempt. "Our request for additional power from the national grid is never considered," he complained.

Alvi said that currently KE takes 720MW to 730MW from the national grid. Chairman Farooqui, taking into account the statement by the KE chief, asked whether KE must be held responsible for Karachi's electricity woes since June 22.

At this, the KE chief vehemently denied being responsible. "KE cannot be blamed for the current situation," he said. Farooqui said that KE should have foreseen the increase in demand and planned to meet the shortfall in advance.

MNA Aftab Siddiqui said the power utility sends huge bills to small consumers. "Why has KE not improved its electricity distribution system?" he asked. The Nepra chairman,

during the hearing, also showed disapproval over the KE chief finance officer responding to customers' queries instead of the chief executive during the video conference. "Where is the CEO?" asked Farooqui, to which he was told that Alvi is away on a call with the power ministry.

"The CEO cannot get up and leave a court hearing," remarked the Nepra chairman, adding that the power utility has frequently been taken to court over various matters.

Imtiaz Sheikh, the power minister for Sindh, thanked the Nepra chairman for conducted a public hearing. "Karachi has a serious loadshedding problem. Nepra must come here and see for itself," he said.

Sheikh said he doesn't wish to assign blame to anyone and invited the federal government to also come down to the city so the issue can be resolved "once and for all". To this, Vice Chairman Chatha responded by saying that the authority will soon pay the city a visit.

"Will Nepra end K-Electric's monopoly in Karachi?" lawyers from Karachi asked the chairman. "Nepra wants to create a competitive environment in the power sector," the Nepra chairman assured them.

All Pakistan Textile Mills Association (Aptma) Executive Director Shahid Sattar said the industry is not being provided power and the gas has been cut off too. "Who will be responsible for the loss of the industry?" he asked.

The Nepra chairman said the purpose of the hearing had been to gather all the facts and that a verdict will be issued at a later date. According to a press release issued by Nepra following the hearing, a four-member committee has been formed "to visit Karachi immediately, conduct further investigations on the ground and submit a detailed report to the authority before the end of next week".

It shall be headed by headed by Director General (Monitoring & Enforcement) and will contain Nepra professionals and experts. Necessary action will then be taken based on the findings in the report.