

Centre to take over K-Electric if performance not improved

KARACHI: The Federal Minister for Planning, Development & Special Initiatives Umar Asad Umar announced that K-Electric will not carry out unannounced load-shedding from Sunday (today) onwards because the government has decided to increase the supply of furnace oil and gas to the power utility. However he gave a stark warning to the power utility that if it does not resolve the issues, the federal government may take over the organisation.

He was addressing the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf protesters who later called off the party's sit-in at the K Electric offices against unannounced load-shedding and alleged over-billing. Federal Minister for Planning, Development & Special Initiatives Umar, Sindh Governor Imran Ismail and Special Assistant to Prime Minister on Power Shahzad Qasim visited the protest camp to tell the protesters that the KE management has assured them of stopping unannounced load-shedding.

The federal ministers Umar and Qasim had arrived in Karachi on Saturday morning after they were ordered by PM Imran Khan to get the electricity problems of the city resolved. After persuading PTI lawmakers from Karachi to end their protest, Umar along with Ismail and KE CEO Moonis Alvi talked to the media, saying that the decision of ending unannounced load-shedding was reached during a high-level meeting of government officials and the power utility earlier in the day. "The Petroleum Division has increased the supply of furnace oil to KE, and it will be increased further. Currently 190 million cubic feet of gas is being supplied to KE. This has been increased to 290 million cubic feet," said Umar. The federal minister was also accompanied by PTI MNA Aftab Siddiqui, MPAs Haleem Adil Sheikh, Khurram Sher Zaman, Saeed Afridi, Jamal Siddiqui and Raja Azhar, and others. However, Umar warned "But if KE can't solve them despite help, the federal government will not look the other way and will use the entire power of the law to ensure that the people are not deprived." The PTI did not sign any agreements with KE, the previous governments did. If a takeover is needed, that will be done," he remarked. He clarified that KE was a private organisation, and that the previous governments had privatised it and the power generation process. "But it should be noted that Karachi has not been privatised."

"In the beginning a few dual-fire units of the power utility will be run on furnace oil, which will later be extended to all dual-fire units," said Umar. However, he added, increasing the supply of oil did not mean the Petroleum Division was at fault. "Nepra [the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority] is the regulatory authority. It completed a hearing on Monday, and will give its verdict later. Nepra will release a report in three to four days and take action against the company regarding power cuts, and the government is ready to act."

He also said that before next summer, an additional electricity of 550 megawatts will be generated for Karachi. "And after the provision of 800 more megawatts to the city in summer 2022, a total of 1,350 megawatts of electricity will be increased in the metropolis." Collectively, he claimed, 2,150 megawatts of additional energy will be given to Karachi by summer 2023. He criticised the previous governments for inking agreements worth billions of dollars to increase power generation in Pakistan but not taking decisions as to how Karachi could benefit from the increased power generation.

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Meanwhile, the governor said he was summoned by the PM over the KE issue. He also said the Petroleum Division has assured us that they have increased the supply of gas to KE." Governor Ismail said the government is trying its best to deal with the electricity issues. "After the government's efforts, there will be no more unannounced power cuts in the city from Sunday. Nepra will conduct an audit into the issue of over-billing, and if found to be true, the KE CEO will refund the money."