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No more unannounced load-shedding in Karachi, says Asad Umar

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has ended its protest after federal minister Asad Umar assured the protesters that K-Electric will not carry out unannounced load-shedding Sunday (today) onwards because the government has decided to increase the supplies of furnace oil and gas to the power utility.

The PTI's sit-in outside the KE head office in Gizri, where they had been protesting against unannounced load-shedding and alleged over-billing, entered its sixth day on Saturday.

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.

Umar and Qasim 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, Khurrum Sher Zaman, Saeed Afridi, Jamal Siddiqui and Raja Azhar, and others.

"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 said the government's purpose was to determine how to end unscheduled load-shedding in Karachi. "We have decided to increase the supply of gas as well as furnace oil to KE, and as a result, there will be no unannounced load-shedding in Karachi from Sunday." 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.

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."

Umar said he and the Sindh governor had told the KE chief that the federal government wanted to help the power utility solve the problems of Karachi's people.

"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."

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."

The governor said he was summoned by the PM over the KE issue. "We decided that there will be no unannounced power outages in Karachi from Sunday. He also said the Petroleum Division has assured us that they have increased the supply of gas to KE."

'No bearing'

Sindh Energy Minister Imtiaz Ahmed Sheikh claimed that Umar's announcement will have no bearing on the persisting power crisis in the city, adds our correspondent.

In a statement issued on Saturday, Sheikh said federal ministers have been making such announcements about the lingering electricity crisis for the past several days.

He said the ministers are engaged in a failed attempt to salvage KE. He also said the Centre has done Karachi no favour by increasing KE's gas supply.

He pointed out that up to 190 mmcf/d had already been available to the power utility. He also pointed out that load-shedding had increased in Karachi because of a shortage of furnace oil supply to the power company.

Sheikh said the people of Karachi are made to suffer continuously due to constant bickering among different agencies and institutions. He added sarcastically that PTI's lawmakers had actually held the sit-in to register their protest against the ill-advised policies of the PM and his cabinet.

He said the city's people had been completely indifferent to the PTI's sit-in, adding that the people were not the least bit bothered whether the protest continued or came to an end.

The minister said that the duration of announced and unannounced load-shedding had lately been increased to 16 hours a day. He said the Centre should now inform everyone what the duration of announced load-shedding would be.

He also said the gas supply to industries and CNG stations in Karachi had been curtailed after the announcement that gas supply to industries was being increased. He added that shutting down industries and CNG stations would further aggravate the issue of mass unemployment in the country.

Sheikh said that instead of admitting that they had failed to overcome the power crisis in Karachi, the relevant federal ministers had been subjecting the masses to further economic miseries.

The provincial energy minister hoped that Umar would live up to the promises and commitments he had made earlier with the workers of the Pakistan Steel Mills.

'Nationalise KE'

Terming the PTI's protest against load-shedding just a drama, Jamaat-e-Islami Karachi chief Hafiz Naeemur Rehman demanded that KE be nationalised, and that the proposed increase in the power tariff be immediately withdrawn.

Rehman said that through its recent announcements, the Centre has been hoodwinking the people of Karachi who have been asking for cheaper electricity without any load-shedding.

He was addressing a demonstration organised by the party's Karachi chapter near the Nursery suburb to protest against the prevailing electricity crisis in the city and the consistent issuance of allegedly inflated bills to KE consumers.

A large number of party workers and residents attended the protest. Carrying banners and shouting slogans against the power utility, they demanded that the country's rulers spare them from the monster of power load-shedding.

The JI's demonstration was a part of an ongoing series of protests against prolonged load-shedding and alleged over-billing. On Friday the party had held protests at more than 100 locations across the city, mainly outside mosques, to show their anger over frequent power cuts and allegedly inflated bills.

Addressing the protesters, Rehman said the city's sole electricity distribution company has been committing a crime by carrying out long hours of load-shedding on a daily basis, issuing allegedly inflated bills and increasing the power tariff.

The JI chief also lambasted KE for "collecting undue money from consumers through over-billing and fuel adjustment charges". He also called for the cancellation of the power company's licence.

He claimed that KE is being supported by several political parties, including PTI and Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan, because they stay tight-lipped over the rampant load-shedding in Karachi.

He asked how the two political parties in the federal government could protest against KE when the Economic Coordination Committee had already allowed the utility to raise the power tariff.

However, he said, the workers of these political parties are frustrated with their leadership because of their "criminal silence" on KE's atrocities, and "a significant number of them have joined the JI's protests in the city".

"We will be the voice of the people and will demand that the authorities revoke KE's licence for not delivering. Our protest is peaceful and in line with the democratic norms. We have always held peaceful gatherings against the civic administration on injustices with the citizens."

Commenting on the PTI's protest outside the KE's head office, Rehman asked the PTI leadership why they had not been protesting outside the PM House in Islamabad against the excesses of the power utility with Karachi's residents.

He criticised PTI leaders, including federal ministers Umar and Ali Zaidi, for their "sham" announcements on the power crisis and for claiming "false" resolution. "Traditional announcements by PTI ministers and leaders on all civic crises is their routine business."

He said that only 30 per cent of the industries are operational, while wedding halls and restaurants are closed because of the pandemic, yet load-shedding is still on the rise in Karachi.

The JI's Osama Razi, Abdul Razzaq Khan, parliamentary party leader in the city council Junaid Mukati and Najib Ayubi, traders and labour leaders Mehmood Hamid, Khalid Khan, Muhammad Islam Khan, Arshad Islam and Javed Shams, and others also spoke on the occasion.