

### **Govt defers decision to hike power tariff in Karachi**

ISLAMABAD: The federal cabinet has deferred a decision to increase price of electricity for consumers of the K-Electric (KE) – the power utility that provides electricity to Karachi – and to put an additional burden of Rs73 billion on people of the metropolis who are already facing acute power outages.

According to sources in the federal government, the cabinet meeting that Prime Minister Imran Khan chaired on Tuesday discussed proposed increase in tariff by the KE in view of the cost of gas it has to import to meet the city's energy requirements.

Minister for Planning Asad Umar and Minister for Information Technology Amin-ul-Haq opposed the tariff hike for the KE consumers and said the decision was inappropriate in the first place as Karachi is not getting enough electricity.

The federal ministers also opposed collection of Rs73 billion from domestic and commercial consumers of the city on account of imported gas. Later, the cabinet postponed the decision to increase the price of electricity for the KE consumers as the prime minister called a meeting in this regard on Thursday.

KE Chief Executive Officer Moonis Abdullah Alvi told the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (Nepra) on July 10 that the federal government was responsible for power outages in Karachi as it is neither supplying oil nor increasing gas supply to the electricity producer.

"The PSO [Pakistan State Oil] has conveyed that it could not provide oil and rather asked us to utilize gas. 250 million cubic feet per day (mmcf) gas is given against a demand of 280 mmcf," he had said.

A day later on Saturday, Asad Umar had a meeting with the KE chief after which he had announced that there would be no unannounced load shedding in the city from July 12.

The Ministry of Power had also vehemently denied the K-E's claim, saying 800 megawatt (MW) of power was available but the KE's system was unable to carry more than 750MW.

Talking to media after the meeting, Minister for Information Shibli Faraz said the federal cabinet has issued directives to the provincial governments for constitution of provincial finance commissions to ensure equitable distribution of development funds among various areas of the provinces.

"Minister for Planning Asad Umar would supervise the matters pertaining to the provincial finance commission in Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan [provinces where the ruling PTI or its allies are in power]," he said.

He said generally chief ministers and influential provincial ministers utilize development funds in their own constituencies, which creates a sense of deprivation among the people of other areas. Under the provincial finance commission, every district would get its share of development funds under a formula.

He said the cabinet directed the missions abroad to take steps for the release of some 11,376 Pakistanis jailed in various countries. The PM directed authorities to provide legal assistance to the prisoners and the missions should strive for their early repatriation if any relief was possible due to the coronavirus.

The minister said the prime minister expressed his determination to ensure transparency in the Senate elections. Questions were raised on the transparency and fairness of Senate election in the recent past.

Faraz said appointment of heads of various government institutions is a big challenge as no proper system has been evolved for the purpose where irregularities were committed in such nominations.

The prime minister, he said, wants a system be in place to nominate suitable persons for the key posts. Dr Ishrat Hussain committee has been asked to make a comprehensive plan and introduce a transparent system for such nominations on fast-track basis, he added.

He said the federal cabinet had so far held 93 meetings, in which a total of 1,759 decisions were made, with 1,579 of them implemented, 46 were in the process of implementation and 28 were facing delay.

Talking with reference to healthcare, he said as the government has limited resources, joint ventures with the private sector were proposed to build hospitals on the state land to improve the infrastructure.

The cabinet also discussed the proposal to set up Hajj Fund and steps would be taken to ensure that no institution would spend pension funds for any other purpose.

For the Hajj Fund, he added, the Malaysian model would be followed after removing legal hurdles in its establishment.

The cabinet was also briefed on the proposal to provide solar stoves to the people in northern Pakistan to prevent deforestation in the region.