

### **Power cuts spark more protests across Sindh**

KARACHI: As excessive load-shedding in Karachi continues to spark protests, Sindh Energy Minister Imtiaz Ahmed Shaikh called a meeting to be held on Tuesday to discuss and devise solutions for the problem that has long gripped the metropolis.

Announcing the meeting on Sunday, the minister said that the meeting would be attended by the heads of power supply companies, including K-Electric (KE), the Hyderabad Electric Supply Company and Sukkur Electric Supply Company. In this regard, the minister has directed KE chief executive officer to bring a copy of the agreement between the power utility and the government to the meeting.

Besides, Shaikh has contacted the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority chairperson, moving him to hold a meeting with the relevant authorities and stakeholders in Sindh on the matter, so a solution may be devised for ending load-shedding in the port city.

Speaking to the media, the provincial energy minister claimed, "Energy Minister Omar Ayub tried to mislead the Senate on the matter, while he has been admitting before the media that the entire country is facing load-shedding."

He went on to say, "If the Centre is serious about ending load-shedding, it should take practical steps," giving assurances that the provincial government would cooperate with the federal government on the issue.

### **PPP's protest**

Meanwhile, Pakistan Peoples Party's (PPP's) Karachi wing staged a demonstration outside the Karachi Press Club, protesting load-shedding and overbilling by KE.

Speaking on the occasion, PPP's Sindh chapter general secretary Waqar Mehdi alleged that Muttahida Qaumi Movement's (MQM) Babar Ghauri was involved in the Karachi Electric Supply Corporation's (KESC) privatisation.

Referring to reports that Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's election campaign in 2018 was funded by KE owner Arif Naqvi, he claimed this had kept the Centre from taking any action against the power utility. "They have left Karachi at their [KE's] mercy," remarked Mehdi.

He called out the Centre for only raising the electricity tariff in Karachi, dubbing it an act of "prejudice."

Pointing out that the power utility was unable to meet the city's electricity demand despite the closure of businesses during the pandemic, the PPP leader criticised KE for "failing to upgrade its system but taking billions on that account."

### **MQM's rejoinder**

In response to the PPP's allegations, MQM's Khawaja Izharul Hassan highlighted a 'secret agreement' reached between Sindh's ruling party and KE in 2009, claiming that the PPP had showed blessings on KE and oppressed Karachi's people in the past.

"Instead of stopping KE, PPP forgave its arrears of Rs31 billion," he claimed, adding that even as the power utility 'looted' citizens, it was forgiven loans of billions of rupees by PPP.

### **AWP's demonstration**

Separately, the Awami Workers Party (AWP) also staged a protest against KE, demanding a reversal of the tariff hike, 25 per cent reduction in consumer tariffs, end to load-shedding, waiver of fuel adjustment charges and an audit of KE assets. Addressing the protest, AWP leader Amar Azizi called for nationalising KE and making the audit report of its assets public.

"We will also constitute a public joint investigation team, comprising engineers, economists, journalists and lawyers from Karachi, to investigate KE," he announced.

Also speaking on the occasion, AWP's Khurram Ali lamented, "While KE's parent company has been making huge profits through the power utility, it continues to ruthlessly loot Karachiites and is facilitated by the provincial and federal governments." He further expressed dismay over KESC's assets being sold to a private company that was "robbing" citizens. "Electricity, gas, water and other such resources should be under the government's control," asserted AWP's Shafi Sheikh, adding that private entities would only be driven by their profits.

The protest was joined by business owners, shopkeepers and students, who highlighted the struggle of students in taking online classes in the face of excessive load-shedding.