

**No stakeholder takes responsibility for Karachi power woes**

ISLAMABAD: The power crisis in Karachi continues unabated amid the suffering of consumers in the scorching heat but no stakeholder — in the public sector or the private utility — is ready to take responsibility for it.

Based on this crux at a special meeting, the Cabinet Committee on Energy (CCOE) on Monday set up yet another inquiry committee to ascertain the reasons behind the ongoing electricity shortage and asked the law ministry to explain by law and the rules of business 1973 what responsibility be-longed to which stakeholder.

Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Asad Umar presided over the hurriedly called meeting following the weekend barbs exchanged in public by the Karachi-based private utility — K-Electric — and the ministry of energy without the resolution of the power shortfall in the country's largest city of 15 million.

A cabinet member told Dawn that cabinet colleagues had heated discussions with each other for the poor planning and management of power situation in Karachi by KE. An angered Maritime Affairs Minister Ali Zaidi said the people of Karachi had come to their neck, seriously affecting whatever goodwill his party had earned over the years and the meeting should not conclude before addressing the issue.

*Another probe panel set up to ascertain reasons for electricity shortage*

The Chief Executive Officer of the KE reportedly blamed the power and petroleum divisions and financial issues hampering the utility's capability to meet expectations of its consumers. An official statement quoted him as explaining that the KE system faced electricity shortage which varied from 600MW early last week to around 150MW a day earlier and the measures being taken by the company to overcome the shortages.

Some participants observed lack of demand assessment on part of the KE and then the insufficient fuel arrangements by the petroleum division.

Minister for Energy Omar Ayub Khan, who heads the power and petroleum division, asserted that fuel quota for KE had been enhanced by cutting down the share of the rest of the country at the cost of citizens of other major cities.

Also, he said the power division had offered 500MW of additional power from national grid to the disadvantage of the consumers of other parts of the country who now faced loadshedding and that was maximum his ministry could afford. The ministry of energy has gone out of its way to reduce sufferings of people of Karachi, he asserted.

He said some people appeared playing to the galleries and others shifting responsibility but the energy ministry had provided whatever was demanded from it and that too beyond the call of duty and out of the way.

The KE chief executive reportedly agreed that the government had taken some steps but insisted the fuel supplies — both in terms of furnace oil and gas — were significantly short of KE's expectation.

A participant told Dawn that it appeared the KE was reluctant to take maximum LNG at its cost and instead preferred local gas to avoid making it a precedent for future plants.

Adviser to the Prime Minister on Finance and Revenue Dr Abdul Hafeez Shaikh noted that despite long and healthy discussions we have not been able to identify reasons behind the current crisis as nobody was taking any responsibility.

Minister Asad Umar agreed that no stakeholder was taking responsibility and this was very unfortunate and in such an atmosphere solution to the sufferings of the people could not be found. He directed the petroleum and power divisions and KE to come up within in two weeks with each and every action that was required in the past and for future with the support of and identification and definition of responsibilities by the ministry of law and justice so that no stakeholder could shrug off respective responsibility.

The committee also constituted a committee under Shahzad Qasim Special Assistant to the PM on Mineral Resources to ascertain within a week the reasons, including the fuel supply chain related issues, which led to the present electricity crisis in Karachi.

The Secretary Power, a Director General of Petro-leum Division and Chief Executive KE would be part of the committee. "The roles and responsibilities of various stockholders in relation to supply of electricity to Karachi should be clear to everyone, which should form the basis for accountability in case of failures," an official statement quoted Asad Umar as saying.

It said the special meeting was called to review the electricity demand and supply situation in Karachi and the steps being taken to address electricity shortages. It said the ministry of power reported that all possible assistance was being provided to KE to make sure that sufficient supply of electricity was available to the people of Karachi.

The CCOE directed the ministry of energy to maintain regular liaison with K-Electric with regard to Karachi's future power requirements and to make sure that such situation does not arise in future.

The meeting was attended by Minister for Energy Omar Ayub Khan, Minister for Maritime Affairs Ali Zaidi, Adviser on Finance Hafeez Sheikh, Special Assistant to the PM on Petroleum Nadeem Babar, Special Assistant to the PM on Mineral Resources Shahzad Qasim and officials of various divisions.