

Age-old system causing power breakdowns

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ISLAMABAD: The Ministry of Energy (Power Division) on Monday admitted before a parliamentary panel that the dilapidated transmission network could not pick and transport the entire power, causing power breakdowns countrywide.

It is worth-mentioning that close to the expiry of its constitutional term, the PML-N government had claimed that the system had surplus power, but the ministry officials explained to the Senate Standing Committee on Power that currently the country is facing 4,599MW shortfall. The committee met here with Senator Fida Muhammad in the chair.

The committee was told that the previous government had focused more on generation, putting upgradation of transmission lines and distribution on the backburner. Last week, the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (Nepra) also attributed the frequent countrywide power breakdowns to dilapidated and incapacitated transmission network.

Nepra said the NTDC had failed to conclude projects to share the burden of its overloaded grid stations. "The power regulator allowed the NTDC to invest Rs96.63 billion during the last three years to improve reliability of transmission network. However, the NTDC failed to bring any improvement in its network," Nepra said in a statement.

Briefing the committee, Pakistan Electric Power Company (PEPCO) officials said the current power shortfall is 4,599MW, as the demand stood at 23,301MW while the power generation was 18,742MW.

"It is practically incorrect to say the country is having zero loadshedding, Secretary Power Division Naseem Khokhar said. He said people on 62 percent feeders were facing zero loadshedding whereas consumers on category-II and III were facing two-hour loadshedding during the holy month of Ramazan. He further said the government has also directed the power companies not to resort to loadshedding during Sehr and Iftar on those feeders where the losses were high.

Khokhar said record 20,800MW power generations was achieved this year, but the distribution system was unable to fully pick it. He said the distribution companies could not use this power due to constraints in the system. He further said the distribution companies are facing high losses and have no money to improve their power systems. He further said the Peshawar Electric Supply Company (Pesco) needed Rs9 billion, Hyderabad Electric Supply Company (Hesco) Rs3 billion and

Quetta Electric Supply Company (Qesco) Rs1.20 billion to improve the power system.

Khokhar said the Power Division has asked the government to allocate Rs20 billion in the federal Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) for improving their distribution systems but the government refused to allocate the required amount.

He said these companies are also facing power theft and the Power Division has written to the chief ministers to stop this theft, but government machinery is not being used to stop it. The CEO of Pesco said their demand is 2,700MW but power system is unable to use this electricity due to constraints in the system. He said the Pesco system could not pick electricity more than 2100 MW.

Senator Sadia Abbasi demanded that different parts of Sindh province should be provided with electricity. Senator Maula Bakhsh Chandio protested over delay in the launch of electricity schemes in the remote areas of Sindh.

The Secretary Power Division said people won't benefit even if power schemes are launched in the province due to power theft. He said areas of Sindh are already getting less electricity due to power theft. The members of committee raised questions about over the 36 percent losses of Pesco. The Pesco chief said power theft is at peak in their region adding that 200 feeders have 80 percent losses out of total 992 feeders.

He said as many as 400 feeders are facing 60 per cent losses adding that Rs9 billion is required to improve the power system. The members deliberated on the loss-making Discos (distribution companies) and how to have a sustainable plan for financing these entities.

A sub-committee headed by Senator Nauman Wazir was constituted to look into the matter. The sub-committee will have Senator Maula Bakhsh Chandio and Aurangzeb Khan as its members. The committee was told that the average transmission and distribution losses for 2017-18 are 17 percent.

The Pesco had highest percentage losses at 36.6 pc followed by Sukkur Electric Supply Company (Sepco) facing 35.7pc and Hesco 29.1pc losses. The Islamabad Electric Supply Company (IESCO) was termed the lowest loss making Disco with 7.1pc.

The recovery percentage of Discos was also shared with the committee, with Faisalabad Electric Supply Company (FESCO) posting 100pc recovery, Lahore Electric Supply Company (Lesco), Gujranwala Electric Supply Company (Gepco) and Multan Electric Power Company (Mepco) 98pc and Iesco and Pesco 90pc. Qesco is the sole Disco with lowest recovery percentage at 24pc.