

Electricity users suffer as stakeholders play blame game

ISLAMABAD: Under high summer temperatures, electricity consumers across the country, particularly those in Karachi, continue to face the brunt of power breakdowns and loadshedding as the stakeholders remain engaged in blame game for the crisis.

The power regulator — Nepra — is taking “serious notice” of media reports during the last couple of days about “excessive and unannounced” loadshedding in Karachi, followed by Hyderabad and Sukkur service areas and then by all distribution companies across the country.

The power division of the federal government, on the other hand, has played down any electricity shortage at the national level and blamed the inadequate distribution and transmission capability of K-Electric (KE) to off-take additional 500MW from the national grid offered by the government. Officials said the national grid was operating with a surplus of almost 1000MW and could easily spare half of that for Karachi.

The private power utility KE serving the country's largest city, meanwhile, appears to be shifting the responsibility of electricity shortages to the federal entities and sudden rise in industrial and business activities for higher demand. A meeting of the board of directors of KE ‘expressed serious concern’ over sufferings of the consumers as it reported difficulties were caused by “national level shortages” of fuel.

The Ministry of Energy in a statement said the federal government had gone out of its way to offer 500MW of additional supply to ease sufferings of the people and businesses but KE system constraints were a hurdle. It said the increased loadshedding in Karachi by KE was wrongly being “attributed to non-availability of fuel by the federal government”.

Power division says no shortage at national level; KE blames furnace oil, gas shortages for the crisis

It said the government was providing 800MW electricity to KE and was ready to provide additional 500MW. It blamed KE for the problem, saying the “system up-gradation on part of KE has not taken place at the appropriate level and with appropriate investment”.

It said keeping in view welfare of the people of Karachi, the federal cabinet had already approved provision of additional 1,100MW from the national grid to KE but its network was not able to absorb the additional electricity at present and its system up-gradation would go on until 2022-23 to fully take the additional supply.

Moreover, the power division said the supply of LNG was also available but on account of Article 158 of the Constitution, only a limited quantity of LNG was being taken by KE. “SSGC is providing a total of 250-290MMCFD of gas to KE including 75-100MMCFD of LNG”.

On top of that, the petroleum division has also made arrangements for supply of 80 per cent of domestic furnace oil production to KE to run its power plants. In addition, the federal government has made arrangements for supply of 30,000 tonnes of furnace oil from storage of other power plants to immediately fulfil requirements of KE. Also, the Pakistan State Oil has been authorised to float an international gallop tender to purchase furnace oil for KE.

The power division said the cabinet had also approved allocation of 150MMFCD of LNG for new power plants of KE but those plants would be completed in 2021.

The ministry of energy said it was “unfortunate to note that KE did not make investment in the system up-gradation and modernisation due to which it is facing difficulty at the time of peak demand” even though the government was ready to extend all available support for provision of uninterrupted power supply to the residents of Karachi.

Later in the day, the KE in a statement said its board expressed serious concerns over inconvenience to consumers “due to furnace oil and gas shortages in the country and unavailability of adequate fuel to KE severely impacting its power generation”. It said this was “national level shortage and that KE was not the only company affected”.

Talking about “proactive measures” to manage the expected surge in power demand during peak summer, KE said: “The chronic issue of mounting receivables and resultant strain on cash flow could potentially impact completion timelines of KE’s upcoming projects and future investment plan”.

Nepa, on the other hand, said it had taken “serious notice of various media reports regarding unscheduled loadshedding of up to 12 hours by all the Distribution Companies (DISCOs)” due to which the public was suffering heavily in this current wave of heat, especially in the areas under lockdown due to Covid-19. It asked the Discos to submit reports on the matter and take immediate remedial measures to minimise loadshedding.

A day earlier the regulator had said it had sought similar explanation from KE besides seeking reports on inflated electricity bills being charged to the consumers.

A power ministry official said out of about 9000 feeders, around 121 feeders on the national grid (excluding Karachi) faced short term tripping and there was no shortage across the country. However, the low recovery areas could face some power cuts in case of any local constraint on the part of any specific company.