PRESS RELEASE

Stakeholders decry highhandedness of KE against its consumers

KARACHI, Jan 30: The participants of a meeting attended by representatives from different stakeholders, such as consumers, activists, journalists, and experts decried the issuance of inflated bills sent by the city's power utility every month despite cold weather in the metropolis. There is no complaint redressal mechanism for the K-Electric consumers and NEPRA has also failed to provide any relief to power consumers, participants said.

They were speaking at a Dialogue to Evolve Consensus on Citizens Agenda around K-Electric on Current Power crises in the City jointly organized by The Knowledge Forum and the National Commission for Human Rights (NCHR) on Tuesday.

An NCHR Member from Sindh Ms. Anis Haroon, CEO of Pakistan Institute of Labour Education and Research (PILER) Karamat Ali, Secretary General of Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum (PFF) Saeed Baloch, Imran Shahid from Jamat-e-Islami, consumers representative Muhammad Arif Bilwani, Naeem Qureshi, Managing Editor the Energy Update, Yasir Darya of Darya Lab, Ms. Zeenia Shaukat and others spoke on the occasion.

The participants said that K-Electric is punished even its so-called Star Consumers by over-billing and charging additional taxes and charges. When filing a complaint, the consumers are forced to pay the bill without any reduction or settlement.

Karamat Ali of PILER called KE a "Ghunda" organization and argued that all utilities should be under local government control. He urged citizens to unite on this issue and proposed the creation of an action plan and a platform to address consumers' issues.

Arif Balwani pointed out that all NEPRA hearings are now conducted on Zoom with very few participants from consumers. He also mentioned that the Consumer Affairs division of NEPRA and the Sindh Electricity Department, which has two electric inspectors can receive consumer complaints. However, he noted that the courts often stay all NEPRA decisions against KE.

Ms. Zeenia Shaukat briefed the meeting about The Karachi Forum (TKF) and its working, emphasizing the importance of climate change discourse for citizen engagement. She highlighted the significant role of fossil fuels in climate change, with the power sector being a major consumer. In particular, she noted that 40 per cent of the coal used in Pakistan's power sector comes from Thar. The government is also promoting Thar coal as an indigenous fuel, which can save foreign exchange.

Shaukat warned of future risks to the 3.4 million consumers of the power utilities, particularly KE, which is responsible for power generation, transmission, and distribution. She revealed that 97% of KE's power generation relies on fossil fuels. According to NEPRA rules, all companies must submit an annual plan for power acquisition. Last year, KE submitted a power acquisition plan, proposing a least-cost approach with 24% renewables and 54% coal. KE claimed that their costs would reduce with increased use of indigenous coal, despite the global trend of declining investment in coal.

Saeed Baloch raised concerns about load shedding, which sometimes lasts more than 8 hours a day in the city. Despite this, bills are not declining, he complained. He criticized the application of the peak hours system on the bills and said there is a lack of an easy complaint mechanism.

Imran Shahid echoed these concerns, adding that even star customers are affected by technical load shedding. He also criticized KE for shifting the circular debt onto consumers and for challenging NEPRA's authority and seeking stay orders on NEPRA's decision against KE.

Naeem Qureshi criticized KE for not paying its dues to the government of Pakistan, PSO, SSGC, and other utilities like Water Board, KMC etc. He called for an inquiry into the original agreement with KE. He also criticized the ineffectiveness of the Consumer Affairs of NEPRA against KE. Despite the efforts of individuals like Hafiz Naeem, Qureshi lamented that citizens are not joining the cause against KE.

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