

Two-day conference on solution for energy crisis

Ignoring Thar coal reserves main reason for energy crisis

ISLAMABAD: Experts at a conference on solution for energy crisis wondered why the abundant coal reserves of Thar have been ignored all these years to solve the worsening problem of power shortage which has virtually rendered over 400,000 workers jobless and brought industrial progress to a halt.

They urged the coming elected government to speed up plans to use the coal reserves and other sustainable sources of energy like solar and wind power to generate electricity at far cheaper rates than what the inefficient and corrupt system of Independent Power Producers (IPPs) was delivering.

At the two day conference organised by Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) and Hanns Seidel Foundation of Germany (HSF), Dr Masoom Yasinzai Vice Chancellor of Quaid-e-Azam University claimed the country had both the physical and scientific resources to solve the energy problem but the policy makers just did not want to listen.

He said Dr Samar Mubarakmand had been crying hoarse and his own University had practicable solutions for the problem if the authorities only gave them a chance. He mentioned molasses from the sugar industry of which 80 percent was being exported at junk market rates instead of being used as a source for energy generation.

He said making biogas and using biomass for energy generation was not rocket science that the country could not use as a sustainable and environment friendly source but the academia's work was being neglected and all of its research was going waste.

He quoted UNESCO, which says countries made no use of their natural resources were bound to become poor. The present economic growth rate needs to be doubled and allocation for education should be raised to 4 percent if the country has to be saved from economic doom.

Mirza Hamid Hassan former Secretary Water and Power said the relegation of hydel power to 30 percent in the present energy mix from its former 70 percent had made electricity exorbitantly expensive.

He said the country needed an integrated energy policy, institutional arrangements and end to theft and line losses to overcome the present crisis. Dr Khanji Harijan of Mehran University said if these natural resources could be put to use Pakistan could produce nine times of its power consumption needs and the entire countryside could be electrified without causing harm to the environment.

Dr Vaqar Ahmad of SDPI said at present 22 departments were dealing with energy in the country. This fragmentation of governance was behind the present mess. He said government should supply gas to power producers according to their efficiency. He also favoured energy trade with India.

Dr Gulfranz Ahmad an energy expert and former Secretary, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Resources said in Pakistan's energy mix the proportion of oil based electricity was 33 percent whereas it was one percent in India and 2 percent in USA.

Having been incharge of the relevant ministry even he did not know why oil imports were being used for power consumption.

He opposed small generating units and said economies of scale with optimal location should be employed. Dr Shaheen Akhtar favoured run of the river projects while bigger dams came up.

Dr Ejaz Ahmad Secretary Coal and Energy nd Development Sindh government said work on Thar coal was going apace. He rejected objections against Thar coal and quoted figures from world use. He claimed 41 percent of energy in the world was coal dependent while in Pakistan with one of the world's largest coal deposits it was only 0.07 percent. staff report