

 ISLAMABAD - A sub-committee of the Council of Common Interests (CCI) has partially endorsed much advertised energy policy, besides unanimously allowing action against gas and power thieves and submission of drafts of recovery ordinance to the next CCI meeting, sources said on Monday.

Earlier, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkwa provinces during a meeting of the CCI had raised serious concerns over the draft of Energy Policy 2013-18 formulated by water and power ministry to put an end to chronic blackouts, which have slowed down economic growth of the country. The CCI held its meeting with Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif in chair and chief ministers of four provinces in attendance.

The provinces raised concerns over the adjustment of recovery of outstanding dues of power theft owed by government-owned and privately-owned bodies through federal adjusters and due to difference of opinion of the stakeholders (provinces) the CCI had constituted a technical committee. The committee was mandated with a task to remove the reservations and concerns of the provinces expressed in the last CCI meeting.

Sources privy to the development told this scribe that a meeting of sub-committee of the CCI was held under the chairmanship of Secretary Inter-Provincial Coordination Faridullah Khan on Monday to settle the pending issues. Chief secretaries of four provinces along with provincial member (technical) attended this important meeting. The meeting gave its partial approval to table the new energy policy in next CCI meeting. It was also decided that provinces would present their difference of opinion in upcoming CCI sitting.

The meeting has, however, decided that Energy Policy 2013-18, action against gas and power thieves and a draft of recovery ordinance would be tabled in next CCI sitting scheduled to be held on July 31 (tomorrow) for final approval.

The sources also told that both Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkwa provinces had expressed some minor concerns and reservations on the proposed five-year energy policy of the PML-N-led federal government during the meeting and also gave some suggestions to the committee for consideration. The provinces, however, had partial agreement on the efforts of the Centre to formulate a new energy policy for controlling persistent energy crisis in the country. Suggestions put forth by both the provinces about power theft and recovery by federal adjuster would be presented in the upcoming CCI meeting, sources added.

"Owing to uncontrolled power theft in both provinces, Sindh faces a loss of Rs125 billion annually while Khyber Pakhtunkwa bears a loss of Rs100 billion annually. If the upcoming CCI meeting approves the Energy Policy 2013-18, the power theft recovery would be adjusted through federal adjusters, a senior official at petroleum ministry said.

As per draft of energy policy, power sector subsidy will be phased out till it come to nil, end to power cuts will be made possible till 2017 and surplus electricity till 2018, government-owned power plants and a few power distributing companies (DISCOs) will be privatised, cost of power generation will be brought to a single-digit from two-digit, water and power ministry, national electric power regulatory authority, oil and gas regulatory authority will be restructured, outstanding dues owed by government-owned and privately-owned bodies will be adjusted through federal adjusters and regional transmission and power trading system will be established.

"Pakistan will build a profitable, bankable and investment-friendly power sector that would meet the needs of its population and

Written by Administrator

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boost its economy in a sustainable and affordable manner while adhering to the most-efficient generation, transmission and distribution standards, "draft of Energy Policy 2013-18 reads.</p><p style="text-align: justify;">

Similarly, the details of the proposed two separate draft ordinances on gas and power theft recovery have disclosed that those who will be involved in gas theft or meter tampering will face huge penalties and the ones who will help nab the people involved in stealing gas will be awarded with two per cent of the recovered amount.</p> <p style="text-align: justify;">

The name of informers will be kept secret. The government, under the proposed ordinance, will establish the gas utility courts for recovery of damages. The gas utility courts will be having the powers to extend the punishment of 2-3 years imprisonment with penalty in the range of Rs3 million to Rs10 million.</p> <p style="text-align: justify;">

Presently offences, penalties and procedure in relation to the theft of electricity are imposed under the Electricity Act, 1910. However, this mechanism is weak and has not resulted in any significant recoveries or deterrence. Only Rs 3.2 billion has been recovered out of the total detection bills amounting to Rs 13 billion. Furthermore, out of the total 7,800 distribution feeders in the national grid (except KESC), as many as 4,000 feeders are suffering from a loss of more than the standard figures (0-10%). About 15 billion units of electricity have been lost during FY 2012-13, out of which at least 25-40% are considered to be lost due to outright theft translating into loss of upto Rs 90 billion. There is thus an urgent need to rectify the present situation that the ministry of water and power finds itself in. Accordingly, a draft ordinance to amend Pakistan Penal Code 1860 (PPC) and the Code of Criminal Procedure 1898 (CrPC) has been drafted.</p> <p style="text-align: justify;">

The draft ordinance enumerates offences of dishonest abstraction, illegal interference or tampering with transmission and distribution power systems with penalty of rigorous imprisonment which may extend upto three years and with fine which may extend to 10 million rupees or both for transmission offences and two years and with fine which may extend upto three million rupees or both for distribution offences.</p> <p style="text-align: justify;">

Similarly, offences against improper use, interference or tampering with electric meters by domestic, industrial, commercial and agricultural consumers have been included. The penalties for such offences range from one year imprisonment or fine which may extend to one million rupees or both in case of domestic consumers and three years or fine which may extend to six million rupees or both in case of industrial and commercial consumers. For agricultural consumers such offences carry a penalty of rigorous imprisonment which may extend upto two years and with fine which may extend upto two and half million rupees or both. Moreover, offences for damaging, destroying or destructing the transmission lines, distribution lines or electric meters have been specified with punishment of seven years imprisonment and with fine which is not less than three million rupees. The financial loss caused to the government or DISCOs and any outstanding penalties/fines shall be recoverable as arrears of land revenue.</p> <p style="text-align: justify;">

The courts and the procedure as laid out in the PPC and CrPC shall exclusively determine the trial of offences in relation to the electricity theft. These offences are suggested to be non-bailable, non-compoundable and with arrest without warrant and are specified through amendment to the Schedule II of the CrPC. In the meanwhile, the ministry of water and power also is in the process of issuing ♦Unified Incentive and Reward Rules♦ for adoption by the DISCOs incentivising reporting and detection of theft by general public/employees of the DISCOs.

Courtesy: ♦Nation</p>