

Discriminated gas supply to Punjab: Chambers threaten civil disobedience move

The Presidents of all Chambers of Commerce and Industry of the province have threatened to start civil disobedience if the federal government continued to discriminate Punjab in supply of natural gas. The heads of all Punjab chambers met at Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry on Monday to chalk out a joint strategy against Punjab specific suspension of gas that has crippled its industry and economic activities. They demanded the government to ensure equitable sharing of gas among all provinces where the shortages are shared equally by all provinces instead of burdening Punjab with all shortages. The mood of the Punjab business leaders representing entire trade and industry of the province was very aggressive. Many of them advocated immediate street protests and agitation along with workers besides starting civil disobedience movement. Some of the participants among them however asked them to first give the government a last chance to set the things right.

They then decided to stage a protest in front of Governor's House and then a sit-in at the Lahore residence of Prime Minister Yusuf Raza Gilani on Saturday January 7, 2012. Some of the business leaders expected that these protests will bring sanity among government planners and they would ensure fair distribution of gas to all provinces. The civil disobedience movement was thus postponed to give government a chance to stop its discrimination against Punjab. The participants pointed out that the gas disruption has resulted in closure of numerous industrial units through out the province rendering millions of workers jobless. They said the power supply by the state utility is also erratic and short that has reduced the productivity of those lucky units still operative to one third.

All the speakers pointed out that as patriotic Pakistanis they do want to share the burden of shortages of natural resources. However total burden of these shortages cannot be passed on to Punjab only, they said. Muzamil Sultan the president of Faisalabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry was particularly more agitated as he represented the Industrial hub of province where more than half million workers are employed at power looms that operate only 8 hours a day. This he added has made 300000 power loom workers redundant. He said the entire textile processing industry of the country is located in Faisalabad that cannot operate without gas. He said suspension of production in the processing industry has grave consequence on the downstream value added industries. He said one the stocked processed textiles exhaust all the value added textiles would be closed.

President Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry Naeem Anwar Qureshi regretted that the government suspended gas supplies to Sialkot industries that consist of small and medium 100 percent exporting industries. "We have built the infrastructure including airport, dry port and roads in Sialkot from our own resources" he said adding that the governments' denial of gas to Punjab has nullified the

efforts of Sialkot entrepreneurs to strengthen our economy. “Government simply cannot abdicate from its responsibility of ensuring adequate availability of power and energy to the industries” he added.

The LCCI President Irfan Qaiser Shiekh said that the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry would utilize all available resources for equitable supply of gas to the industry in Punjab. He said that it did not make any sense that in one part of the country gas is available to the industry while in the other part there is a total closure. LCCI Senior Vice President Kashif Younis Meher and Vice president saeeda nazar also spoke on the occasion. Mehr Salahudin Vice President Gujranwala Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Mirza Muhammad Mushtaq President Gujrat Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Mrs kukab Parveem President Women Chamber, Waseem Akhtar President Sahiwal Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Muzaffar Saleem Chaudhry President Rahim Yar Khan Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Manzoor Malik former president Shiekhupura Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Zafar Jamal EC member Rawalpindi Chamber of Commerce and Industry and Vice President FPPCI Azhar Majeed Shiekh, LCCI former President Mian Anjum Nisar, former Chairman Poultry Association Abdul Basit, former PHMA Chairman Shahzad Azam Khan, LTIA chairman Iftikhar Bashir, LCCI Executive Committee member Sheikh Mohammad Ayub and Presidents of Trade orginsations Ashraf Bhatti and Khalid Pervaiz were prominent among the speakers.

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