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Govt urged to abandon coal power projects

KARACHI: Pakistan Fisherfolk Forum, which works for environment and peoples' rights, has urged the government to use alternative renewable energy instead of coal and other fossil fuels that are dangerous for the environment and people.

Chairman PFF Muhammad Ali Shah, Umer Mallah, Aslam Mallah and Naseer addressing a press conference in Islamkot on Tuesday said that it was fact that several countries in the world were avoiding from coal energy and considering it a dirty energy. Protest campaigns are on the go in many countries. Several countries in the world are reverting back from coal-based energy. Contrary to that, our government is giving priority to coal power projects and developing it.

Since 2013, they said, trend has increased to construct coal power plants in the various areas of the country. Sindh and Balochistan coast (Karachi, Hub and Gawadar) and Thar Desert (Tharparkar) has been points of coal power plants. Several power plants have already been completed in these areas while some of them are under construction. Due to coal energy development, health and environmental issues are taking place. These issues will become serious in coming days.

According to Climate Risk Index –CRI Pakistan is at the seventh number of countries suffering from climate change impacts.

Currently, work is continued on three coal blocks of 13 coal blocks in Thar. Besides, coal power plants' work is also continued and coal mining is affecting eco system of Tharparkar. Moreover, people's historical right of livelihood is also being affected. Health of people of Thar, natural beauty of Thar, and underground drinking water has been put on risk in Thar.

We have to consider that coal energy is not development but it is indeed destruction. The coal-based power plants would create issues related to emission of greenhouse gases and an increase in the temperature along with air, water and surface pollution, they said.

According to a study report by an international group, a huge combination of coal mines and power houses in Thar is underway. Under which, nine coal power plants have been planned in Thar with 10 Gigawatt power generation. The planned coal power plants would be a mega centre of environmental pollution, mercury and carbon dioxide emission, which will make Thar one of the dangerous places in South Asia.

According to the study, the suggested coal power plants would lead towards death of 29,000 people in its operating life or 30 years of operations due to its air pollution. In addition to it, there would be 40,000 asthma emergency room visits, 19,906 new cases of asthma in children while 32,000 children would die pre mature. People won't be able to go on work for 20 million years (They will be on leave due to ailments) and will lead a paralysed life for 57000 years due to lungs disease, diabetics and stroke.

The planned Thar Coal power plants will emit 1,400 kg mercury and 5,000 heavy metal particles (dust of coal) every year, whose one fifth parts will store on land and the mercury will affect the fertile land. The one fifth of mercury emitted by coal power plants will be stored on surface of land that will damage land and sweet water storages. It will be around 350 kilogram annually. According to one estimate, more than 125 mg per hectare emission of mercury will spread in 1,300 square kilometre area and will affect 100,000 people.

World scientists and institutions working against fossil fuels are linking coronavirus with the air pollution, as more people are suffering from coronavirus in those countries where air pollution is increased. It is true that coal and other fossil fuel energy development has major connection with air pollution and climate change.

Under the current scenario, instead of environment hazardous power projects, alternative renewable energy projects should be initiated and the federal government should focus on environment friendly projects under the light of Alternative Renewable Energy Policy 2019 draft, they demanded.

They also demanded that government should rehabilitate those people who have been affected by displacement from the area of Gorano dam, provide them grasslands and abandon Gorano dam.