

THE POWER CRISIS IN KASHMIR

As Kashmir's cold winter sets in, the demand for power grows. Devastating power outages, which have historically been a problem in the winter, have begun even earlier than in previous years. Though the power development department is supposed to schedule power cuts (4.5 hours for metered areas, 7 for non-metered), all areas of the valley are facing disruptive and unscheduled power cuts every day for 5-7 hours at a time (The Wire). Electricity tariffs have however been inflated arbitrarily, even though the outages are much worse than before (United News of India). As a result, residents of several affected areas have staged protests against the erratic power cuts (Kashmir News Observer).

Power Theft

Kashmir only receives 20% of the electricity it generates through its hydroelectric dams. The other 80% is being diverted to India including Punjab, Delhi, and Himachal Pradesh (Newsclick). In short: as India steals electricity from Kashmir, Kashmiris are suffering dangerous power outages while officials blame the outages on consumer over-usage.

False Promises

Modi promised Vikas (development) for J&K following August 5th, 2019, and to make the electricity available 24 hours a day (The Wire). However, matters have only become worse as the historic COVID-19 pandemic has produced a 'double lockdown' effect for Kashmiris living under Indian occupation. These outages come along with a host of other false promises by India's right-wing government.

Who is being affected the most?

The Sick

- As a result, families who must squeeze under one roof to share electricity during outages are also more likely to transmit the virus to one another (The Hindu).
- Power outages mean that home ventilators which sick individuals rely on cannot be consistently powered.
- "My COVID-affected mother is oxygen dependent. Generators are the only means for such patients to survive. Where will poor people go? Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can provide oxygen cylinders

Rural Populations

- Outages have been even worse for rural populations, who can rely even less that they will have any sort of consistent power access that day (The Wire).

Students

- Students are unable to work and study after sunset as the electricity to power the lights can no longer be relied upon (The Wire).

Local Business

- Many local businesses and industries, who have already suffered under the 'double lockdown' and Indian oppression, are being severely affected by not having regular access to power.

Photo: Danish Ismail