

KESC's poor performance

THE shoddy performance of the Karachi Electric Supply Corporation (KESC) has been brought into sharper focus, this time during a meeting of the National Assembly's standing committee on water and power. The KESC's recent decision to disconnect the power supply to the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board in a bid to recover outstanding dues was the principal focus of discussions at the meeting. As things stand, the poor management of power supply has led to frequent power riots in the city in the past few months. By hampering the water supply as well by cutting power to the KWSB's pumping stations, the KESC has added to the woes of the heat-weary residents of the city. The KESC chief's argument that if he did not take action against the KWSB, he would have no moral ground to take similar action against other defaulting consumers is countered by critics who say that a step that would lead to further miseries for the people should be avoided by coming to some amicable agreement between the two utilities.

The army management of

the KESC since 1999 has little to show in the way of better operational performance. Despite tall claims to the contrary, it has failed to deliver on most counts. Line losses remain high at 38 per cent, partly because of an outdated transmission and distribution system as well as rampant power theft which the KESC has failed to check. Power failures continue to be frequent and often for long hours entailing huge commercial and industrial losses; besides causing misery to millions of domestic consumers. Despite massive injections of funds by the federal government, the KESC has failed to achieve any significant improvement in its overall performance. An aggravating factor is the weak financial position of the KESC because of large-scale defaults of power dues by bulk consumers — and not just the KWSB. But to come out of the woods, the KESC must begin to tackle the many operational drawbacks and shortcomings that have long afflicted it and raise its performance to a higher level of reliability and efficiency commensurate with the working norms of a public utility.

In the 21st century the purpose of research is to generate wealth. Unfortunately our scientists are weak in this area. Consumption not production has been the norm. How long can the nation support this non-producing scientific pursuit? Either we quickly learn to generate wealth by application of scientific knowledge or rely on imported technology and its products and remain subservient.

The heavy investments (around 20 billion dollars) made mostly in Defence Production and Nuclear sector have been significant achievements but the spin-offs have not reached the market place due to lack of commercial discipline. For the first time the present regime increased the financial inputs in civilian technological development. Perhaps Dr Attaur Rehman was the first real scientist to head the Ministry of Science and Technology that included both Telecom and S & T Divisions. Despite driving home the importance of research and the needed resources, the generation of wealth has not been achieved. Socio-economic development continues to be a challenge. The future of science and technology in Pakistan hinges on marketable research that will generate not consume wealth.

Generation of wealth comes under the domain of technology not science. Most scientists are not exposed to commercial and financial management. For decades Islamabad has been in-

Future of science in P

Sci & Tech

BY KHAWAJA AHMED

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fluenced by a few scientists who have used their clout and influence in acquiring resources that they get to control. Personal projection does not translate into wealth generation for the nation. This investment was not for intellectual curiosity and research.

Most scientific achievements are reviewed by peers while technology has to withstand competition from the market forces. Unfortunately Pakistan has performed poorly in both areas. Recently the government has started a process to gauge the 'Impact factor.' Again it is calculated on scientific achievement with no consideration for marketability and socio-economic impact. A scientist may have a very high impact factor yet unable to generate the much-needed wealth. In a document published in India called 'Science and Technology Policy-2003' (www.tifac.org.in/news/policy.htm), amongst other factors it is stated, "It will be ensured that all highly science based ministries/departments of government are run by scientists and technologists. All the major socio-economic ministries will have high level scientific advisory mechanisms."

For meaningful growth of science and technology Islamabad has to be de-bureaucratized followed by mass influx of qualified scientists and technologists. Technology is a powerful resource which must be managed professionally to generate wealth. Business acumen is needed. Pakistan Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (PCSIR) has created a Marketing Department to be headed by a Marketing Manager. Pakistan Science Foundation (PSF) has created an Industrial Liaison Department to identify and fund Applied Research that is marketable.

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Mirza and Tariq Kirmani to PSO's dominance of the petroleum market cannot be under scored. Munawar Mirza of ICI introduced commercial discipline to PTCL. Recently appointed MD of SSGC Munawar B. Ahmad has enhanced the capacity of the company. WAPDA, KESC, KRL, PAEC, KAMRA, AWC, NESCOM etc should all be headed by professionals having thorough knowledge of commercial discipline.

Technical Entrepreneurship is another weak link. The US ranks highest in this area. Pakistan is seriously deficient because most scientists and technologists seek employment mainly due to lack of entrepreneurial exposure. Once employed they try to cling on to their cushy jobs. Business is mostly left for the relatively less educated individuals who are handicapped due to poor technical background. Our curriculum needs major overhaul to include subjects like Entrepreneurial Management, Project Management, Operations Management, Financial Management.

Venture capital is also non-existent. Loans can be obtained for buying houses but not for starting new high

risk technological ventures. There has been some movement to create Technology Venture Fund now that most banks have excess liquidity. Venture capital drives technological development and is a basic ingredient for growth. In the absence of a genuine Venture Fund, participative financing should be offered by banks like SME, Zarai Taraqati etc. Investments in technology are high risk but carry lucrative rewards as well. The wealth generation of late nineties was mainly due to high-tech investments in the West. Several start-up companies sprung up. New funds have been created to support development in unexplored areas of growth. Fund Managers continuously look for opportunities and then invest for maximum returns.

The Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) is responsible for development in this area. Except for a few good men the Ministry is loaded with Baboos of all kinds who have been there for ages. At the end of his last term as Minister Dr Atta was critical of the road blocks created by the everlasting bureaucracy.

Not just the top, the entire set-up needs a major shake-up. Future of Science and Technology in Pakistan wrests on the shoulders of able scientists. Dr Attaur Rehman has an opportunity to make a difference by focusing on results and understanding the grim ground realities.