

Pakistani refugees not paying for electricity for years

Unpaid bills stand at Tk 44.28 crore. Desa warns to discontinue power supply to 66 camps across the country

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The stranded Pakistanis living in 28 refugee camps in the city have not paid electricity bills for years and the unpaid amount has reached over 30 crore Taka.

Recently, the Dhaka Electricity Supply Authority (Desa) has warned them that it would snap the power supply to

these camps.

Desa in a letter issued on May 5 to the Food and Disaster Management Ministry, said it would discontinue power supply to 66 camps in 13 districts across the country if they fail to pay the outstanding electricity bills estimated at Tk 44.28 crore.

The largest refugee camp in Mohammadpur had Tk 16.48 crore in unpaid bills while the camps under the Dhaka Electric Supply Company (DESCO) area, including the Mirpur Camp have not paid 17.86 crore Taka.

Nearly 2.4 lakh stranded Pakistanis live in Bangladesh with the majority staying in Dhaka. There are about 35,000 inhabitants in six camps at Mohammadpur while 70 to 80 thousand live in the other 22 camps at Mirpur.

Illegal power lines are common in the camps in Mohammadpur and Mirpur. Interestingly, these supposed refugees use all sorts of electronic appliances like television, radio, fans, electric irons and even electric heaters in their houses. Nearly four thousand stranded Pakistani families live in the Geneva Camp at Mohammadpur, each in 8x8 feet rooms. The average family has at least six

members. Sources in Desa said they consume a huge amount of power as they are never pressurised into paying for electricity.

"They get power supplied to their houses by bribing some unscrupulous Desa officials," said a Geneva Camp resident.

Desa officials denied the allegation and said the consumption of electricity is excessive because of the high density of population in the camps. Some refugees also run small factories in the camps by taking illegal power connection, Desa sources said.

"If they do not get electricity they attack our office in groups. We do not enter the camps to check whether they have illegal lines or not out of fear," said Md. Saleh Uddin, executive engineer of Desa. "We do not know the exact unit of power consumed in these camps," he admitted.

"We are already suffering because of the suspension of the relief operation for the last 17 months. Local citizens in Mohammadpur have demolished parts of our camps. Hundreds of Pakistanis have been evicted although the government wants us to stay. We are also not getting safe drinking water for the last two

years," said Shoukat Ahmed, general secretary of the Stranded Pakistanis General Repatriation Committee in Mohammadpur.

Leaders of stranded Pakistanis fear that if power supply is cut, the camps will turn into safe dens for criminals. Already, these camps have earned the notorious reputation as hideouts for criminals and centres of arms and drugs peddling.

Each family living in a camp is supposed to pay 25 Taka a month to the repatriation committee from which it is supposed to clear the electricity and other utility bills. But committee members complained that 50 per cent of the families do not even pay that meager amount.

While contacted, Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf, Minister for relief and disaster management said that they have not taken any final decision on the issue.

"We do not have that much money to pay all the outstanding bills of the camps to Desa, Desco and Power Development Board (PDB). To solve the crisis we will request the finance division to allocate the amount," said Yusuf.



Numerous illegal electricity lines are common at Mohammadpur Geneva Camp.

Rejoinder

Mahfuza Begum, Assistant Headmistress of Monipur High School, Mirpur protested a report on the school titled 'Dismissals of teachers raise fresh controversy at Monipur School' published in the Star City on May 11. In her rejoinder she states that she did not say anything against the present administration of the school. "I did not say that the past administration tried their best to confirm their (new teachers) appointments as most of them were good teachers," she said.

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6x3

6x2

7x3