

# BI-MONTHLY MEDIA MONITOR

*An e-publication of Rural Development Policy Institute*

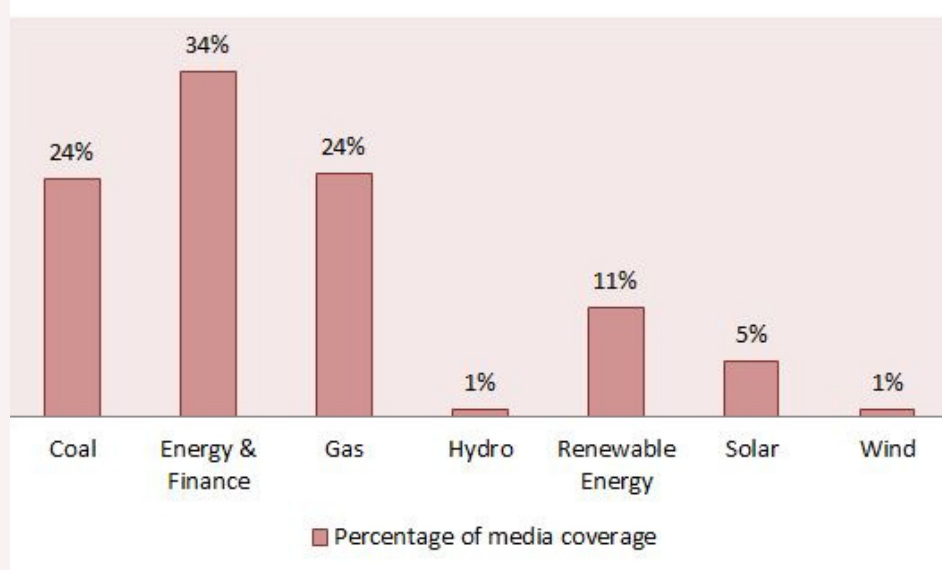
Over the months of February and March this year, Energy and Finance, along with the government's role in the energy sectors of the country, remained the hot topic of discussion for the Pakistani print media. The ever-increasing circular debt and the rising electricity tariffs rightly-so remained the centre of discussion and unlike the preceding months, the media's attention was seen more on the coal sector as compared to the renewable energy.

## ENERGY SECTORS AND ITS KEY ACTORS

The media's focus remained on the multiple electricity price hikes approved by the government and power regulators over the course of the two months. It also came to light that the circular debt of the country is rising by Rs45 billion every month, for which the CCOE approved a plan in order to ease the circular debt.

Although there was a rise in the coverage given to the coal sector, the media mainly highlighted the increasing efforts in utilization of coal, with little to no talk on the impact of coal-based power on the environment and society. The Government of Sindh too reiterated its stance of Thar Coal Power Project being its top priority, while the National Assembly body urged the government to use local coal for power generation. A media report also highlighted that only 195 companies out of 285 operating in the coal mine development sector in Sindh have coal exploration permits. Many updates were also highlighted regarding the CPEC's Thar Coal Block-I project. The Sindh government announced that 40% of mining work is so far completed at Thar Coal Block-I, while Chinese officials too shared their satisfaction over the project making rapid progress despite many hindrances. The project is expected to complete by 2023.

### Energy Sectors



Meanwhile, news from the gas sector mostly revolved around the import, production, prices and distribution of LNG. Compared to the earlier months, there were no news reports of any gas shortages in the country. The matter was previously one of the most talked about issues by the media among all the energy sectors. The media instead mainly focused on the steps taken by the country and the government during that period, in regards to the gas sector.

The media, unfortunately, did not give enough space to the renewable energy sector. Most of the news

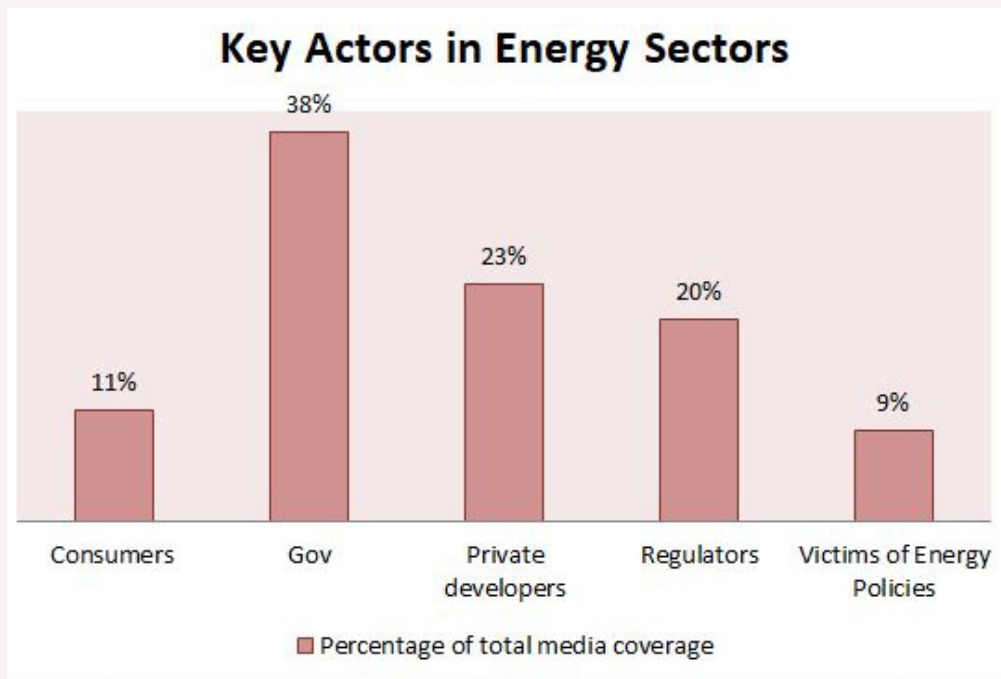
articles discussed Pakistan's plans of moving towards clean energy, such as the country attracting renewable energy investment, foreign partnerships and producing green energy. On a positive front, this time there was a good focus on solar energy by the media as compared to earlier. In a major shift, one of the highlights was the decision taken by the government to shift all public offices in Punjab to solar

energy, which is expected to save Rs108 billion, along with the government and private companies announcing new solar power projects. However, on a downside, the media barely gave any coverage to the wind and hydro energy sectors.

The role of the government in the energy sector of Pakistan mostly remains under the scrutiny of the media and garners much attention, for being one of the major players in the country's energy sector of Pakistan. Similar patterns of news coverage related to the government were observed this time around as well, with a mix of opinion pieces by the experts and news articles related to the energy policies, power generation and tackling energy sector.

Similarly, private developers also grabbed a good share of the media coverage, with the major focus on the independent power producers and their deal. Foreign companies' interest in energy sectors and new power projects initiated by various private investors were also highlighted.

As for the power regulators, the media predominantly covered matters related to the NEPRA and OGRA - from issues regarding changes in power and gas rates to decisions on amendment in ordinances.



Even the smallest modification in any of the energy sectors creates a direct impact on the consumers. Such effects on consumers due to the changes in energy supply and tariff matters remained the point of discussion in the print media, similar to the previous months. The energy sector saw price hikes in both power and gas tariffs in the two months. The federal cabinet also approved the promulgation of an ordinance aimed at creating a legal path to rise power tariff by a minimum of Rs5.65 per unit till October to collect a whopping Rs884 billion from consumers. According to a media report, this second emergency summary has been approved to save the International Monetary Fund Programme from collapsing again.

Meanwhile, the media also seems to be bringing a gradual shift towards highlighting the plight of the victims of energy policy. Although the coverage given to the victims is considerably low, there is still a small change, as compared to previous months, in terms of the media's approach towards highlighting the voices of the oppressed. With many deadly mining accidents witnessed in this year alone, there were multiple op-eds urging the government to ensure safety of coal miners and news on coal mine workers' demand for safety.

There was also a media report on Thar residents protesting against eviction by mining firms engaged in the coal extraction in Block I of Thar Coalfields. Another report highlighted villagers demand for compensation for the forced acquisition of land under the ongoing Thar coal power project. Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah also urged the Thar Coal Block-I Power Generation Company to resettle the displaced families and announced his plans of visiting Thar and reviewing the resettlement plan.

*For this issue, we analyzed the media reports in seven daily print newspapers of Pakistan namely Business Recorder, Daily Times, Dawn, Nation, Pakistan Today, The News and Express Tribune.*