

BI-MONTHLY MEDIA MONITOR

AN E-PUBLICATION OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT POLICY INSTITUTE

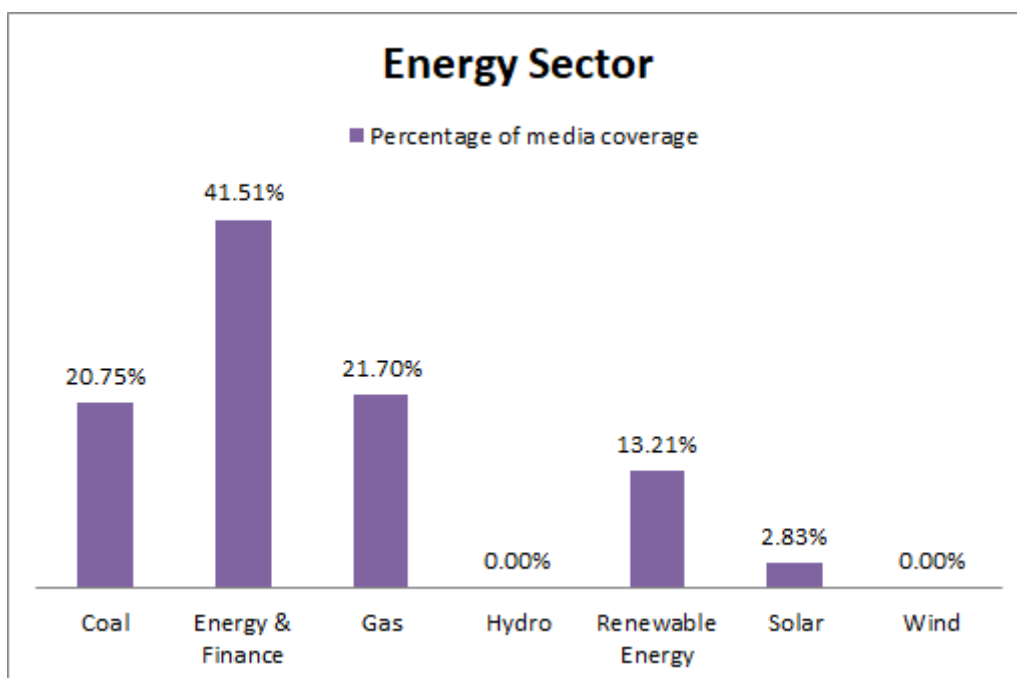
The relentless issue of the rising circular debt made the most media headlines in the last two months, with news reports suggesting that Pakistan might see a further rise in its circular debts in the future. The energy and finance matters have always acquired ample media attention and this time too similar topics made their way to the op-eds and news articles. An analysis of just over a hundred news reports of the print media also showed the growing talk revolving around coal and renewable energy.

Expert opinion

All the opinion pieces primarily focused on moving towards clean energy, Pakistan’s energy crisis and the power debt. Experts shared in these op-eds the urgent need for saving the environment by opting for greener projects that produce clean energy. The People’s Tribunal on injustices being meted out to Thar residents by mining companies excavating coal in the region was also featured in one of the op-eds, which highlighted the plight of the victims of energy policies. The woes of the coal miners have also lately been under discussion more than usual, due to the multiple mining accidents witnessed over the last many months and the poor safety precautions for the miners.

Energy talk: From coal to renewables

It is a hopeful sign to see the Pakistani government being more vocal about the country’s efforts towards producing clean energy. The major highlight in the two-month duration was the news on Pakistani government taking part in the US-initiated Leaders Summit in Washington and informing the international community that the country will shift to 60% clean energy by the year 2030.



A news report underlined Pakistan encouraging private sector investment in renewable energy projects to reach its clean energy goal by 2030 and the country being on track to meet its renewable energy targets. The federal government has also planned to amend the Alternative Renewable Energy Policy 2019, another news report revealed, adding that they did not want more coal-based power plants in the near future either due to policy or lack of bankability. Another reported that a technical report is being compiled on the newly discovered Badin coalfield.

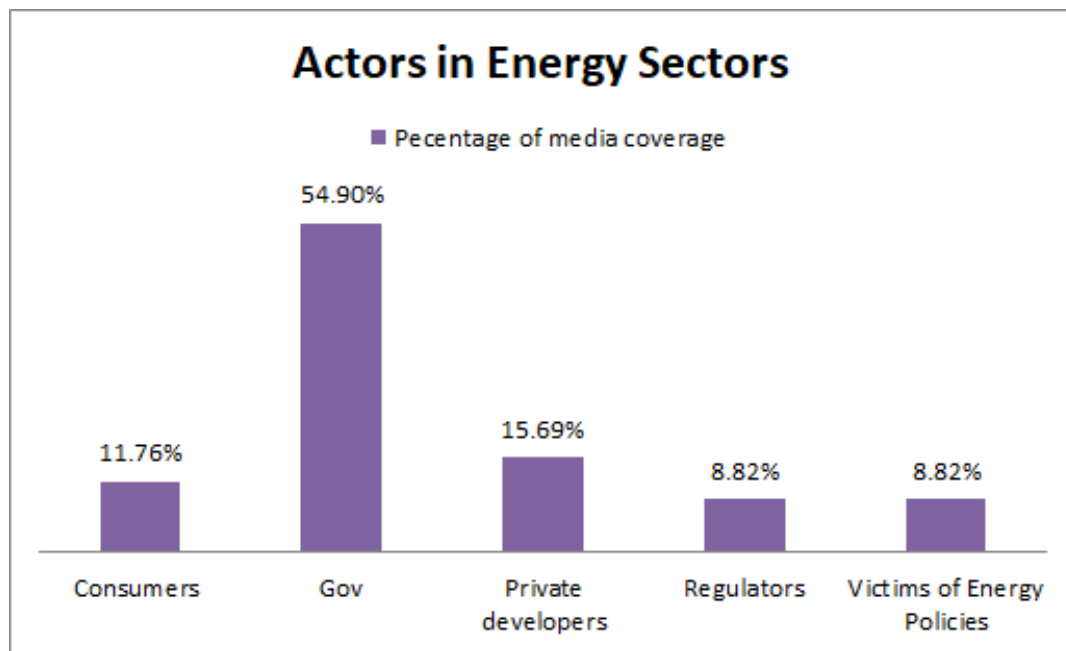
Although there was relatively more talk related to renewable energy as a whole in general, but there was barely any news around solar, wind and hydro in specific. The media, however, did highlight the demand of the representatives of the solar industry to the government for a special and viable tax regime for the industry to unlock its potential and help the country in its drive to become independent in the energy sector.

The media also extensively covered the study launch at a webinar held under the Alliance for Climate Justice & Clean Energy on the harmful impacts on environment and economy of coal gasification and liquefaction projects in Thar. The media highlighted the views of the experts and findings of their study, which included that switching from coal to liquid or gas energy is not feasible and the impact it would have on the region and its people.

There were fewer mentions on topics related to the victims of energy policies. Most of the news revolved around coal miners, which included an accident in which eight coal miners got injured and the devastating news on remains of 16 coal miners found in mass grave who were kidnapped in Khyber a decade ago.

In the news

In the private developers category, the deals and outstanding payments to the independent power producers (IPPs) was the most talked about by the media. The National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) revised tariff components of IPPs, while NAB gave the go ahead to revised deals with in the power producers. According to another news report, the government will buy out 11 IPPs to avoid Rs 450bn capacity payments. The government also decided to merge Alternative Energy Development Board (AEDB) and Private Power and Infrastructure Board (PPIB) for ease of doing business in the power sector. The merger is in full swing for processing power projects of all technologies, including alternative and renewable energy projects, at one place.



Consumer-oriented news was relatively less, compared to previous months. The highlight was a slight reduction in petroleum prices. However, another report brought to light that consumers will likely pay an additional Rs. 1.1 trillion through their electricity bills to the IPPs and idle generation companies, on account of rising capacity payments.

The gas sector received a sufficient amount of media coverage. Pakistan and Russia signing the amended gas pipeline Intergovernmental Agreement made headlines, while new gas reserves were also discovered in Balochistan by Oil and Gas Development Company (OGDCL), which was another highlight in the gas sector. There were also discussions on raising the gas prices to help the oil and gas companies from facing a financial collapse. Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA) also approved a \$0.49 increase in RLNG price. On the other hand, this time around regulators had comparatively fewer mentions in the media, with the news on Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) constructing eight (8) mega projects as the only highlight.

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, and a special report in Baaghi TV.