

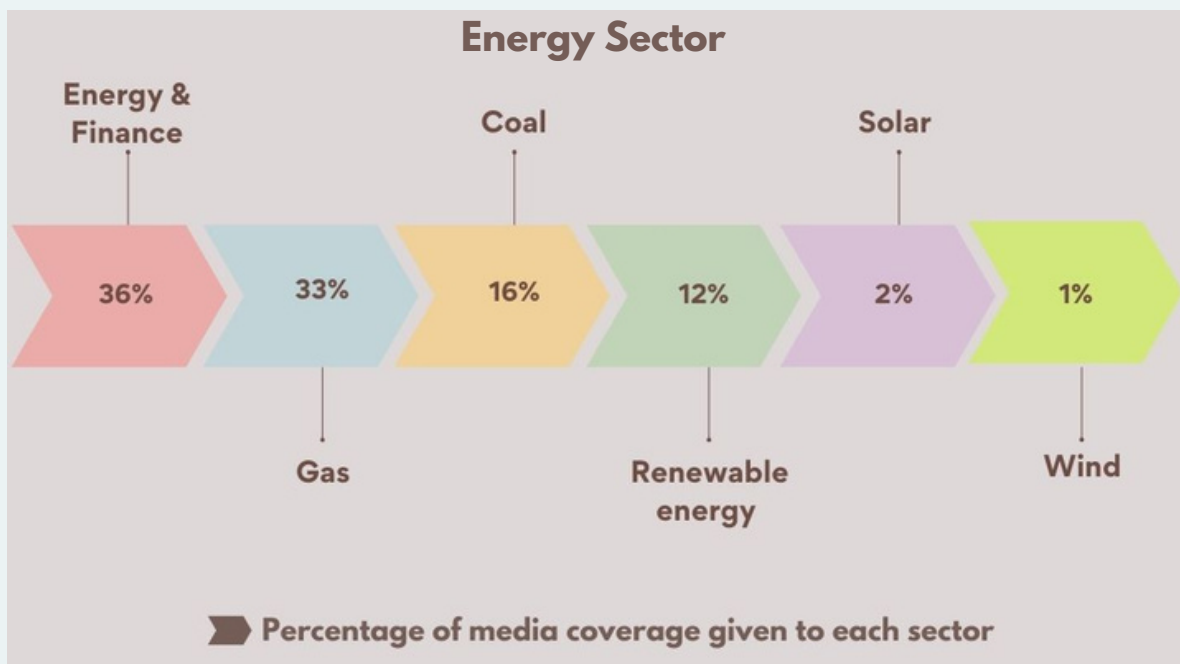
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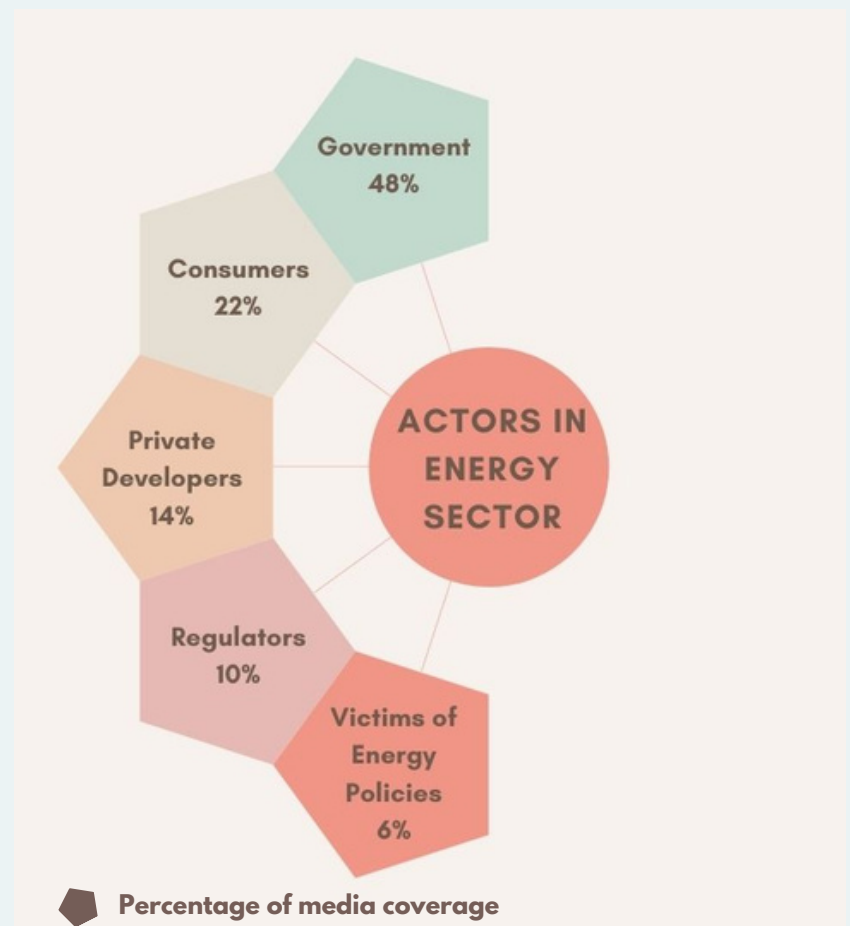
Things continue to look bleak for Pakistan's energy sector, with no positive change in sight. Similar to the past, the media reports once again focused on the constant troubles of the energy sector – from circular debt to the prevailing gas crises in the country. There was also much talk in the media around coal – courtesy of the Glasgow Climate Change Conference, commonly referred to as COP26, in which Pakistan took part.

Pakistan has seen an early onset of gas crises this year, even before the winter season began. Media reports over the past two months show that the government is scrambling to come up with a plan to ensure gas supply to domestic consumers and industries. The entire situation remains so critical that the government bought costliest LNG cargo after issuing tenders for two emergency cargoes of LNG to prevent further gas crisis. The rising circular debt of power sector in general has always been a point of discussion in the media. This time around there was comparatively more discussion by the media on circular debt in the gas sector as compared to previous months.



According to media reports, the government even introduced a 'winter power incentive package' for consumers in a bid to discourage the classic reliance on gas usage in cold season and instead promote electricity consumption. Although there were a decent number of consumer-related media reports, a quick analysis showed that almost none carried any significantly positive news for the consumers as almost all news stories were related to power hikes similar to previous months.

National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) approved multiple power hikes over the course of two months. A media report suggested that power tariffs were the main reason behind the stalled International Monetary Fund (IMF) talks. Pakistan managed to revive the stalled \$6 billion IMF programme in November after agreeing to various conditions including slapping more taxes and approving more power hikes. Furthermore, K-Electric came under the radar of NEPRA for producing expensive electricity and its high production cost. In another news, federal cabinet approved Rs134 billion payment to independent power producers as a second installment.



Coal and its victims

At the COP26, world leaders huddled over the worsening climate change and came up with a to-do list to avert any more damage to the world. The conference was scrutinized extensively by energy sector experts due to the much highlighted debate on quitting coal. What started off as a pledge to completely phase out coal, ended with a promise to just phase down coal. Media reported that Pakistan has also decided to continue using domestic coal but has decided to no longer develop imported coal projects.

Meanwhile, the Thar coal project continues in full swing as the media reported that the Sindh government recently approved phase-III of coal mine expansion project in Thar and expansion of Thar coal Block II. The media, however, failed to highlight what this expansion could mean for the Thari people – the biggest victims of these coal projects. There was, however, one media report that quoted Sino Sindh Resources Private Limited spokesperson claiming of relocating 450 families from two local villages located in Thar Block-I by the company.

Clean energy

Considering the immense need to have more discussion around renewable energy, media needs to vigorously play more part in promoting clean energy talk by giving it extensive coverage. According to a news report, Pakistan’s central bank announced easing conditions for renewable energy financing for investment entities to address rising electricity shortage and promote clean energy. Among other highlights, the government also signed a million dollar project financing pact with Germany for renewable energy development in Pakistan, while another MoU was signed with UAE for ‘green corporation’ to promote clean energy. Another news report said that a Chinese company will be installing solar rooftop PV for a pharmaceutical factory in Pakistan to help the country in boosting its renewable energy capacity. There were also news reports on setting up of country’s first-ever hybrid renewable energy park in Jhimpir, Azerbaijan announcing \$1 billion investment in Pakistan’s energy sector, inauguration of solarization project at Civil Hospital Karachi and a few op-eds urging the government for the urgent need for complete switch to renewable energy.

For this issue, we analyzed 208 media reports published in six daily newspapers and news websites of Pakistan namely Dawn, Business Recorder, Express Tribune, Pakistan Today, Geo News and Samaa Digital.