Energy view from Europe

By Paul Schindler
ROME, Jan 9: A tourist's eye view of Rome, Paris and London indicates that Great Britain has been hit the most harly by the current energy crisis.

While West End stores had lanterns in their windows and "Possibly Circus" neon signs were swithed on a tide of darkness at Christmas time, every moment at store in Paris was lit for New Year's Eve, and Rome's traffic jams are as eternal as ever.

France and Italy have been affected, according to press reports. Italian restaurants must close by midnight. Some French gas stations are running out of gas, and industrial users of natural gas are being cut back 20%. But it is nothing like Britain.

Britain's problem is not only directly, it is a coal mining union's refusal to work overtime, reducing the supply of coal, which is the major power station fuel. During a strike a few years ago, however, such dire consequences were diverted by using oil, unavailable now in needed quantities due to the Arab boycott.

The International Herald Tribune has indicated that the major effect to date in the States has been planning for rationing and some flights at gas stations over Christmas. Britain's check on (between strikers, because the government has asked them to heat only one room in each home) at the light measures that Americans find so draconian. Daily newspaper ads tell them that hospitals and vital services will be cut off at random if they do not conserve fuel.

Britain's suffering next to France's normandy make all the more curious the news that these two countries are fighting European energy-sharing plan. Great Britain, of course, wants to hang on to the North Sea oil it expects to have by mid-1975.

"What about the next 18 months? What if there is not as much oil as we think?" are questions being asked by the man on the street in London, but not in Whitehall (location of much of the government).

Power Engineer

As if to make matters worse, the power engineers are also refusing to work overtime, bringing about threats of massive random cuts.

During the coal miners strike, the power engineers spent many hours driving around "fine tuning" the low voltage power distribution system, thus cutting off a factory on one block, but not the hospital across the street. Without cooperation and overtime, all they can do is adjust the high voltage systems from the power stations, blacking out whole sections indiscriminantly.

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