Volume VIII, Issue 9

Current News
மின் செய்திகள்

September, 2023

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Power outage alerts in Tamil Nadu : Awareness and action (Part-2)

Part 1 of the article explained power outages and the information dissemination mechanisms for planned power shutdowns in Tamil Nadu. This part details the rights of consumers and reporting procedures concerning unplanned/prolonged power failures.

Unplanned/prolonged power failure issues - how to get it resolved? Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation Limited (TANGEDCO) must inform in advance about its planned outages to its consumers. If no authorised details or alerts are given regarding a power cut, consumers may consider that power failure as an unplanned outage.

Even in case of unplanned outages, according to the Electricity (Rights of Consumers) Rules, 2020, it is the duty of the distribution licensee to communicate immediately to the consumers about the outage and the estimated time to restore it. In accordance with the rules, TANGEDCO is obliged to monitor and restore outages in Tamil Nadu. Its timeline for the supply restoration period for rural and urban areas is tabulated.

In case of a prolonged power outage, consumers can raise complaints to TANGEDCO through any of the following mechanisms and get it resolved.

- Inform your area Assistant Engineer/ Operation & Maintenance of TANGEDCO using the region-wise contact information available on the official portal or their local contact number. If no response is received, visit the EB office to file a complaint directly.
- Call the FOC (Fuse Of Call Centre) of your area, details of which are available on the website. The 'contact information' section of the TANGEDCO website can be accessed here - https://www.tangedco.org/en/tangedco/reach-us/contact-information/
- File the grievance online through the official portal - www.tangedco.org. The provision for complaint registration is available under the 'Reach Us' menu of the website.
- Contact the centralised 24x7 call centre - Minnagam on the helpline number 94987 94987.

As specified in Clause 21 of the Tamil Nadu Electricity Distribution Standards of Performance Regulations (TN-DSOP) 2004, if the distribution licensee does not restore the power supply within the stipulated period, it is liable to pay the affected consumers compensation of Rs.50/- for every six hours (or part thereof) of delay in restoration of supply subject to a maximum of Rs.2000/-.

All it needs is awareness and action: As a responsible consumer, be aware of

- the Electricity Board's (EB) emergency contact numbers and the consumer phone numbers that are registered for your electricity service connection with TANGEDCO.
- Be mindful that TANGEDO sends alerts about outages/shutdowns/bills etc. only to registered mobile numbers. To confirm the registered mobile number for your service connection, visit the local EB office.
- Visit TANGEDCO's official website to update, add and check the registered mobile numbers for your service connection. For a single service connection, apart from the phone number of the person registered as the named user, four other phone numbers (of the occupants or owner) can also be updated.

Know your rights to demand minimum standards of service and grievance redressal: Frequent power cuts are a constant challenge in Tamil Nadu. The recent ministerial discussion to limit the unscheduled power cuts to a maximum of 30 minutes points to its seriousness. As lawful consumers of electricity, let us not forget that access to electricity is our legal right and that we are entitled to be informed about power cuts (planned or unplanned) in our area.

(Concluded)

Simple measures for Electricity consumers to participate in the circular economy - Do It Yourself series (Part-4)

The previous issue discussed how the R's (Refuse, Reduce, Repair and Reuse, Repurpose, Recycle) of the circular economy can be put into everyday use, concerning ceiling fans. In this edition let us look at the practice of circular economy relating to refrigerators.

3. Refrigerators: Refrigerators are considered an essential household electrical appliance - they keep food fresh for longer, storing it at lower temperatures. Around 63% of urban and 25% of rural households have a refrigerator. Refrigerators use refrigerant (a cooling substance), which absorbs heat and carries it away from the refrigerator's contents. The hot and cold air are kept separate, thus keeping food items inside cool. The major components of a refrigerator are a condenser and a compressor. The condenser allows the refrigerant to release heat, thus cooling it down. The compressor compresses the refrigerant, and circulates it through the fridge.

A.REFUSE AND RETHINK: Refuse brands that do not have a star rating or a low star rating. Star rating indicates energy efficiency, and the higher the rating, the better. Look for components such as 'inverter technology' which can save as much as 20-40% of electricity as compared to regular compressors. Inverter technology keeps the inside temperature of the fridge more consistent; this in turn keeps food fresher for longer.

•It is better to get refrigerators with a good warranty scheme, e.g. 10 years warranty for digital inverter compressors and 5 years for parts of the device. Try to avoid refrigerators that use chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) as their refrigerant. CFCs are known to contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. Instead, look for refrigerators that use R-134 or R600A as their refrigerant component.

•Rethink the purchase of refrigerators with top of the range features as these are likely to increase energy consumption. Examples of such features include bigger capacity, two doors, auto defrost, and ice-maker. Features like this can increase your refrigerator's electricity consumption by up to 50%.

B.REDUCE: Reduce the energy consumption and energy wastage by your refrigerator. This can be done through regular maintenance including cleaning the door seals, shelves, coil and condenser. Other ways to do this include:

•Not over filling fridge - items inside your fridge can block the air vents contributing to poor air circulation and higher energy consumption; Ensuring the door is closed at all times to avoid heat loss;

•Cleaning your refrigerator regularly, Wiping the coils in the back of your fridge for optimum energy usage. Ensure there is ample space between the wall and also place your refrigerator away from heat sources like the oven, stove, etc.

C. REPURPOSE: When disposing of your refrigerator, dismantle it with professional guidance. You can **repurpose it or its components** like the shelves, trays, metal and plastic parts, etc in creative ways. Old refrigerators can be repurposed as a storage shelf in your kitchen or you can remove the door and use it as a bookshelf. Old fridges can also be used to make a flower bed, a pond in your garden or even a pet house.

D. RECYCLE: Refrigerators contain harmful gases, metals, plastics and cables - recycling it therefore needs to be done by experts. To make sure that your refrigerator is recycled instead of merely ending up in a landfill, contact the manufacturer who will be able to remove and recycle it. Exchange/buyback offers are also a great way to ensure that your old refrigerator is recycled. Remember as a yardstick, the UNDP data that "one recycled fridge gives us 20% of plastic e.g. (vegetable drawers etc) 63% of iron, 6% of coloured metals, 10% of polyurethane powder obtained by processing polyurethane foam, and around 1% of Freon and oil. Recycling of refrigerators will contribute to removing around 10 tons of Freon, which will result in a decrease of CO_2 emissions by 16.5 tons per year".

E. REPAIR AND REUSE: "Repair rather than replace" to extend the life of your refrigerator. Sometimes one or more components of a refrigerator may not work. It is always worth checking with a qualified technician if these problems can be addressed without resorting to buying a new appliance. Simple things like clearing or cleaning refrigerator outlet trays are easy ways to maintain your device efficiency and avoid repairs. Below are some commonly faced refrigerator problems and their quick fixes: Not cooling enough - try cleaning dirty or clogged condenser coils. Over cooling - try to reset your defrost timer/temperature sensor. Strange noises - check for blocks or damage of your fan blades.

(To be continued)

Relaxation for Tariff 1D consumers (Part-1)

Are you one of the consumers sharing the electricity bill for common areas in an apartment in Tamil Nadu? This article summarises recent changes in the electricity charges for the common areas.

As stated in Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016, "common areas" refers to those public areas in an apartment block which are accessed by all residents such as stair cases, lifts, fire escapes, common entrances, exits of buildings, common basements, terraces, parks, and play areas. Maintenance of these common areas is through 'maintenance charges' paid by the residents. Amenities in the common areas are likely to require electricity to power various facilities such as lighting, operation of lifts, water pumps, and any shared equipment such as might be found in a gym or community hall.

Prior to Tariff Order 2022, Tariff Order 2017 was in effect. According to this, TANGEDCO (Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation Limited) established different tariff categories for common areas based on the purposes - domestic and commercial. It is pertinent to mention that the common area is viewed purely from the point of lighting, water supply, lifts etc for the common facilities in a building/ apartment, which requires a separate electricity connection and a meter. . No definition for common area/facilities are given by TNERC. As per the tariff order, the electricity bill for common areas is therefore calculated in two ways:

- Domestic purpose: Amenities such as lighting for corridors, staircases, parking spaces, gardens, terraces, and operation of water motor pumps, and lifts are used by residents for domestic purposes. Hence it was charged under Tariff LT 1A i.e domestic tariff.
- Commercial purpose: Amenities such as the gymnasium, swimming pool, water treatment plants, RO systems, fitness facilities, recreational areas, and clubhouse that were used by the residents were considered as commercial services, rather than as part of domestic usage. Hence the electricity units consumed were charged under tariff LT V i.e. commercial tariff

With the arrival of the September Tariff Order 2022, TANGEDCO introduced a separate tariff category for common electricity connection called Tariff LT 1D at Rs.8 per unit with Consumer Price Inflation (CPI) at 7%. As a result, in July 2023, the Tariff LT 1D was revised based on the general Consumer Price Inflation (CPI) index, from Rs.8 to Rs.8.15 per unit. These changes were then applied uniformly across all apartments, irrespective of the size and amenities they enjoyed. An example of electricity costs under the old (2017) and new tariff (2022) orders are worked out below:

Small apartment block with no commercial spaces (as defined in Tariff Order 2017)		
Tariff Year	Common Area under Tariff 1A (domestic tariff)	Common Area under Tariff 1D
Tariff order 2017 If the consumption is 200 units	Rs.2.5 - Rs.6.6 per unit The electricity bill will be Rs.170*.	-
Tariff order 2022 If the consumption is 200 units	-	Rs. 8.00 per unit The electricity bill will be Rs.2000*.
* The electricity bill includes fixed charges. **The electricity bill includes fixed charges, peak hour charges and e-tax.		

The electricity bill for consumers consuming 200 units bi-monthly was Rs.170 under the previous tariff structure and increased to Rs. 2000 under Tariff LT 1D, the percentage increase being 1076.47%.

(To be continued)

Tamil Nadu News

Lack of rains and reduced water from Karnataka dim Tamil Nadu's hydel power

Tamil Nadu is staring at a significant drop in power generation in the state-owned hydropower stations, primarily owing to the deficit rainfall in catchment areas and reduced water inflow from Karnataka. From April to September 15 this year, TN generated 1,908 million units (MU) of electricity from hydro plants, a substantial decline from the 2,750 MUs generated in the same period last year. The fall in production in the first six months raises concerns about meeting the annual target of 4,200 MUs set by the Central Electricity Authority. "TN has 47 hydropower stations across Coimbatore, Erode, the Nilgiris, and Tirunelveli circles, with a combined capacity of 2,321.90 megawatt. The Nilgiris alone contribute 833 MW.

But due to the poor rainfall during the southwest monsoon, these stations are operating at just 30% to 40% of their potential," said a senior TANGEDCO official. Compounding the issue, Karnataka's refusal to release water to TN has left the Mettur dam with only 13,014 million cubic feet (mcft) of water out of its capacity of 93,470 mcft as of Saturday (September 16). On September 14, Karnataka released a meager 3,142 cusecs as compared to 55,444 cusecs released on the same day last year. Consequently, power generation at the Mettur Tunnel powerhouse and dam powerhouse has been impacted, achieving only 20% of their usual output, the official added.

"As a result, to maintain a stable power grid, Tangedco has had to purchase electricity from private parties, incurring significant costs. Over the past few weeks, Tangedco has spent nearly Rs 1,000 crore on private electricity purchases," he added. In 2022-23, the state-owned power utility exceeded its hydel power target by generating 6,174.08 MUs, surpassing the CEA's target of 3,913 MUs. "This achievement marked a record high for the state in terms of hydel power generation." TN surpassed target for hydel power last year. In 2022-23, the state-owned power utility exceeded its hydel power target by generating 6,174.08 MUs, surpassing the CEA's target of 3,913 MUs. It is uncertain if it will meet CEA's target this year.

Source : The New Indian Express, 17 September 2023.

India News

Cabinet approves the Scheme titled Viability Gap Funding for development of Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS)

The Union Cabinet, chaired by the Hon'ble Prime Minister approves the Scheme for Viability Gap Funding (VGF) for development of Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS). The approved scheme envisages development of 4,000 MWh of BESS projects by 2030-31, with a financial support of up to 40% of the capital cost as budgetary support in the form of Viability Gap Funding (VGF). A watershed moment in the long list of pro-environment measures taken by the Government, the move is expected to bring down the cost of battery storage systems increasing their viability. Designed to harness the potential of renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power, the scheme aims to provide clean, reliable, and affordable electricity to the citizens. The VGF for development of BESS Scheme, with an initial outlay of Rs.9,400 crore, including a budgetary support of Rs.3,760 crore, signifies the government's commitment to sustainable energy solutions. By offering VGF support, the scheme targets achieving a Levelized Cost of Storage (LCoS) ranging from Rs.5.50-6.60 per kilowatt-hour (kWh), making stored renewable energy a viable option for managing peak power demand across the country.

To ensure that the benefits of the scheme reach the consumers, a minimum of 85% of the BESS project capacity will be made available to Distribution Companies (Discoms). This will not only enhance the integration of renewable energy into the electricity grid but also minimize wastage while optimizing the utilization of transmission networks. Consequently, this will reduce the need for costly infrastructure upgrades. The Government of India remains committed to promoting clean and green energy solutions, and the BESS Scheme is a significant step towards achieving this vision. By harnessing the power of renewable energy and encouraging the adoption of battery storage, the government aims to create a brighter and greener future for all citizens.

Source: PIB, 6 September 2023 .

Consumer Focus

The appellant (an advocate) is a tenant who rented an office space (150 sq.ft), for the purpose of running his office. Following an illness, the appellant had to close his office from March 2022 to December 2022. During this period the office was opened only for cleaning purposes, which was approximately 2 to 3 hours, once or twice in a week. According to the appellant, the office space's electricity meter was working correctly until December 2022 with the appellant remitting Rs.1562/- for December 2022. The next bill dated 30-1-2023 was very high at Rs.7624/-. The appellant wrote several letters in complaint about the excessive charges. Initially the complaint was given only to the Assistant Engineer (AE) at the respondent's office. With no response, the appellant filed a further complaint with the Consumer Grievance Redressal Forum (CGRF).

Meanwhile, on 25-4-2023, the respondent (TANGEDCO) removed the fuse carrier, thus disconnecting electricity supply to the office. This step was taken when the appellant was not present in the office and without any effort to resolve his complaints. On repeated visits to the concerned section office, the only advice the appellant received was to pay the higher amounts as indicated by EB bill assessments. The appellant argued that the assessments were not done properly and therefore while he waited for resolution on this, he wanted the connection to be restored.

The respondent sent the meter to be tested for Meter Relay Testing (MRT). Based on the meter downloaded data, the meter was declared as defective. On comparing the downloaded data with consumer ledger, it was found that the assessment readings entered in the consumer ledger from 30/09/2021 to 28/03/2023 were much lower than that actually due. The respondent observed that the reading errors were from the very beginning of the service connection until 14.04.2023. As indicated below, the appellant was paying less than the actual consumption since the date of installation.

The CGRF therefore directed the respondent to collect the amount due from the petitioner as per the Regulation 12 of the TNE Supply Code Regulations on errors in billing and Regulation 11 of the TNESC for assessment of bills during the defective period. The appellant was aggrieved by this order and filed the present complaint before the Ombudsman. The appellant argued that the office is small and the bills raised by the respondent were not in keeping with the size of the space, nor did it reflect that the office space remained closed for several months in between. The appellant requested for the service connection to be restored and that they will only pay the revised bill amount for January 2023 and March 2023.

The respondent submitted that the concerned AE had met with the appellant, giving her a detailed explanation of the remaining dues. The respondent submitted that the appellant had been paying charges lesser than the actual consumption, which meant that the licensee lost revenue due for the consumed units. The respondent further stated that the service connection was used by the office, a tea shop and a hotel in the same premises. It was therefore not an exclusive connection, and hence this was not a record of consumption for just the office room. The service connection was still in use by the hotel and tea shop, even when the office was closed, and hence there was no billing error.

The respondent submitted that the following provisions obligate the appellant to pay all remaining dues.

A. Regulation 4 of TNESC:"4. Charges recovered by the Licensee – The charges recovered by the Licensee from the consumer are:-

Tariff-related charges, namely—(i) The price of electricity supplied by him to the consumers which shall be in accordance with the tariff rates as the commission may fix from time to time, for HT supply, LT supply, and temporary supply for different categories of consumers."

B. Service connection LT (low tension) agreement Form-I, Terms and Conditions, Sl.no.12:

"I/We agree to pay to the Licensee at the applicable tariff/minimum rates/fixed charges/surcharge, etc., that may be decided by the Commission from time to time."

Considering the facts of the case, arguments put forth, and the statutes relied upon, the Ombudsman passed the following order:

- There is no excessive claim of current consumption, the revised charges are correct.
- The appellant has to pay pending consumption charges along with other charges for the service connection to be restored.

Source: **Ombudsman Case**, TNERC

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Citizen consumer and civic Action Group (CAG) is a non-profit, non-political and professional organization that works towards protecting citizen's rights in consumer and environmental issues and promoting good governance processes including transparency, accountability and participatory decision making.

World News

Current News

EU launches probe into Chinese subsidies for electric vehicles

The European Union has opened a probe into China's subsidies for electric vehicle makers, amid concerns the payments are harming European companies. Global markets are now flooded with cheaper Chinese electric cars, and their price is kept artificially low by huge state subsidies. This is distorting our market," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen told EU lawmakers on Wednesday. "As we do not accept this distortion from the inside in our market, we do not accept this from the outside," von der Leyen said. "So, I can announce today that the commission is launching an anti-subsidy investigation into electric vehicles coming from China."

The probe is the highest-profile case against China since an EU probe into Chinese solar panels narrowly avoided a trade war a decade ago. The Commission will have up to 13 months to assess whether to impose tariffs above the standard 10 percent EU rate for cars. The anti-subsidy investigation covers battery-powered cars from China, including non-Chinese brands made there, such as Tesla, Renault and BMW. The move is a victory for France, which has expressed concerns that Europe will fall behind during the green transition if it is not more assertive when confronted with China's alleged protectionism. But some EU member states, including Germany, are wary of angering Beijing, since they rely on trade relations with China, although Berlin welcomed the probe Wednesday.

China's leaders have helped make the country the biggest market for electric vehicles by investing billions of dollars in subsidies to get an early lead in what is seen as a promising industry. Global automakers face growing competition in their home regions from Chinese brands that are taking market share.

Source: Aljazeera, 14 September 2023.

Publications / Regulations

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- India's Energy Storage Mission: A Make-in-India Opportunity for Globally Competitive Battery Manufacturing by NITI Aayog , MNRE
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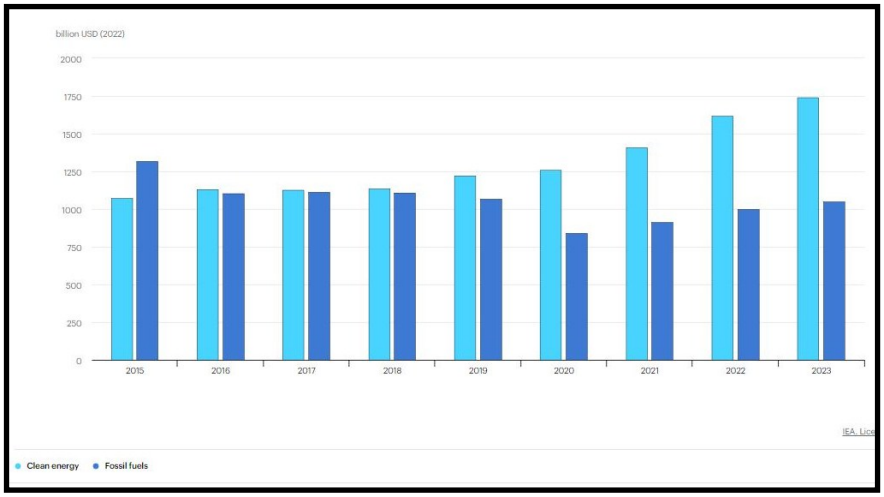

Source: IEA