CURRENT NEWS

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AN OVERVIEW OF THE TRIPURA STATE ELECTRICITY CORPORATION LIMITED (TSECL) CONSUMER GRIEVANCE REDRESSAL FORUM (PART- 2)

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The previous issue discussed the Consumer Grievance Redressal Forum 2020 provisions provided by the Tripura Electricity Regulatory Commission. This editorial will address the significance of the new regulations and explain how these add value as compared to the previous one.

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Citizen consumer and civic Action Group

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Procedures for quorum and decision-making issued by the Tripura Electricity Regulatory Commission (TERC):

The judgement in a Consumer Grievance Redressal Forum (CGRF) is typically given based on the quorum and majority vote of its members. A quorum is the minimum number of members required to be present for the forum to conduct its business legally. The regulations often specify the quorum requirements to ensure that the decisions are made collectively and not unilaterally

According to Clause 2.19 of Consumer Grievance Redressal Forum, Ombudsman and Consumer Advocacy Regulations, 2020, the quorum for a CGRF meeting is two members, including the Chairperson. The decisions are made by a majority of the members present. If there is a tie, the Chairperson will decide it.

Importance of Three-Member Composition:

Clause 2.5 of Consumer Grievance Redressal Forum, Ombudsman and Consumer Advocacy Regulations, 2023 stipulates that the CGRF is to be a three-member forum.

The presence of three members in a grievances redressal forum ensures a comprehensive and balanced approach. Each member contributes a different perspective, and expertise, thus aiding in the prevention of biases and ensuring an equitable evaluation of consumer complaints.

Furthermore, the three-member composition enables the establishment of a quorum, the minimum number of members required for a valid meeting. Typically, quorum regulations dictate the presence of at least two out of the three members, ensuring collective decision-making and preventing unilateral judgments.

Importance of the independent member in the Forum:

The Forum includes two members from the Distribution Company (DISCOM) and a third independent member, who is not affiliated with the DISCOM. The inclusion of an independent member is vital for several reasons:

The independent member is to be a member of a non-governmental organization (NGO)/society/ consumer organisation with at least 5 years of experience in consumer protection and consumer-related matters.

Why do we need an INDEPENDENT member?

- The independent member is typically someone with experience in consumer-related matters. The primary focus of the CGRF is on protecting consumer rights and ensuring that grievances are addressed effectively. The independent member can therefore advocate for consumers and help them navigate the complaint resolution process.
- The presence of an independent member prevents any undue influence from the DISCOM. It strengthens the forum's integrity and prevents conflicts of interest.
- The independent member brings an unbiased perspective to the forum. Unlike other members who represent the DISCOM, the independent member provides a neutral viewpoint. This balance ensures fair decision-making.
- Having an independent member ensures that decisions made by the forum are well-informed and transparent.

Comparison between CGRF Regulations 2005 vs 2020:

- **Structure of the Grievance Redressal Mechanism**

2005 Regulation	2020 Regulation
Grievances were handled by DISCOM officers through the appointment of Grievance Redressal Officers (GRO). The process was less formal, with decisions primarily made internally by DISCOM officers.	Establishes a formal three-member forum for grievance redressal. Decisions are made by a panel consisting of two members from the DISCOM and one independent member.

- **Inclusion of Independent Member**

2005 Regulation	2020 Regulation
Did not include an independent member in the grievance redressal process. The absence of an independent member meant decisions could be biased towards DISCOM interests, with less oversight.	Compulsorily includes an independent member, ensuring impartial and effective handling of consumer grievances. This inclusion is a critical step towards upholding principles of fairness and maintaining public trust.

- **Consumer Empowerment**

2005 Regulation	2020 Regulation
Limited mechanisms for advocating consumer rights within the grievance redressal process.	Stronger advocacy for consumer rights through the independent member.

Conclusion:

The introduction of the three-member composition in the consumer grievance redressal mechanism by the Tripura State Electricity Corporation Limited (TSECL) is a significant advancement towards enhancing transparency and trustworthiness. This structure benefits not only the DISCOM (by building consumer trust) but also empowers consumers to resolve their grievances more effectively. The regulations set forth by the Electricity Act and the Tripura Electricity Regulatory Commission (TERC) provide a robust framework for protecting consumer rights and ensuring a fair and efficient grievance redressal process. TSECL's continued focus on consumer protection and reliable electricity services is essential for maintaining public confidence and fostering a more equitable energy sector in Tripura.

⚡⚡⚡SHOCKING STATISTICS⚡⚡⚡: HOW A SIMPLE DEVICE CAN SAVE LIVES

KIRUBAKARAN.B

In Tamil Nadu alone, in the past 17 years between 2006 to 2013, a staggering 9,000 people and 2500 animals (both domestic and wild animals) tragically lost their lives to accidental electrocution. In Karnataka over the past five years alone, nearly 2539 people and 2534 animals lost their lives in electrical accidents. Many electrocutions occur due to contact with live wires. This can happen outdoors such as when someone touches a downed wire in a flooded area or an electric fence.

However, we are not immune from electrocution inside our homes either. Faulty wiring, switches or plug points can also lead to fatal shocks when a user merely touches them, or even merely comes too close to them. A recent heartbreaking incident unfolded near a village in Karur when a young boy was electrocuted while switching on a ceiling fan, and his grandfather suffered a fatal shock while trying to help. Similarly, in Chennai a doctor tragically suffered a fatal electric shock while plugging in her laptop.

Tragic accidents due to electrical faults in homes can be significantly reduced with a simple device : the Residual Current Device (RCD) or Earth Leakage Protection Device (ELCB). This life saving gadget acts as a vigilant guard in the home's electrical system.

A Typical Single RCD
Source: ABB

RCDs are electrical safety devices that protect against shocks. RCDs monitor the current flowing in a circuit. They have a special transformer with a toroid core wrapped by both the live and neutral wires. In a normal circuit, the current flowing in the live wire should exactly equal the current returning through the neutral wire. This creates equal and opposing magnetic fields in the transformer, canceling each other out. The RCD detects this balance and stays on. If there is a fault, like a damaged appliance or someone touching a live wire, some current leaks to earth instead of returning through the neutral wire. This creates an imbalance in the magnetic fields within the transformer. The RCD detects this imbalance and trips, cutting off the power instantly.

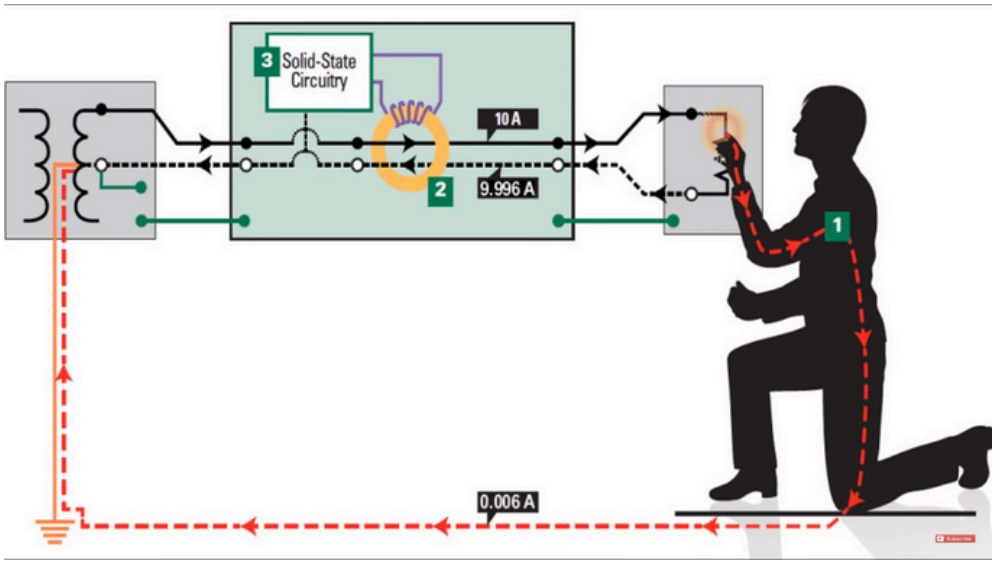


Image depicting working of RCD
Source: chrvoje_engineering

Essentially RCDs act like guardians, ensuring current goes only where it's supposed to. Any leakage triggers a shutdown, protecting you from shocks. RCDs do not protect against all shocks, but they are very effective for earth leakage scenarios. They come in various sensitivities depending on the application. Proper earthing is crucial for RCDs to function effectively.

Understanding the critical role of RCDs in preventing electrical accidents, the Tamil Nadu Electricity Regulation Commission (TNERC) took a significant step. Through amendments to the Tamil Nadu Electricity Distribution Code (Notification No. TNERC/DC/8-28, dated December 24, 2020), they made it mandatory for all new buildings to install RCDs before receiving an electricity connection. This regulation further encourages existing buildings to adopt these life-saving devices as well.

As per TNERC regulation on RCD :

- The supply of electricity to every installation of low voltage (240 V) and medium voltage (415V) including installations of temporary supply shall be controlled by a Residual Current (operated) Device (RCD), whose rated residual operating current shall not exceed 30 milliampere for protection against electric shock, so as to disconnect the supply on the occurrence of earth fault or leakage of current.
- In the case of installations having large number of motors, equipment, appliances of loads totalling above 10 kW, one common RCD at the point of commencement of supply with rated residual operating current of 300 milliampere for protection against electrical fire shall be provided, in addition to RCD not exceeding 30 milliampere rating for protection against electric shock.
- An installation, where there are a large number of loads giving rise to a sum of permissible leakage currents exceeding 30 milliampere, shall be subdivided into circuits to avoid nuisance tripping and each sub-divided circuit shall be provided with an independent RCD with leakage current sensitivity rating not exceeding 30 milliampere at appropriate location(s).

In today's world, our homes are filled with an ever-growing number of electrical appliances that consumers thoughtfully purchase at significant cost. While these devices bring convenience, they also introduce potential electrical hazards. A Residual Current Device (RCD), costing around ₹5000, offers a simple yet powerful safeguard against these dangers. By quickly cutting off power in the event of a current leakage current, an RCD can prevent serious injury or even death from electrocution. For a relatively small investment, you can ensure a safer electrical environment for yourself and your loved ones.

CONSUMER FOCUS

The appellant has a commercial service connection. On 05/2023, he received a bill for Rs. 12450 (which was considerably higher than previous electricity bills which ranged from Rs. 450 to Rs. 500). Following this, the appellant lodged a complaint with TANGEDCO to inquire about the reasons for the increased bill. In response, TANGEDCO stated that there was an outstanding amount of Rs. 11599 due to a disputed meter period (from 16/06/2017 to 25/12/2017), and this amount was therefore added to the current bill. Unhappy with this explanation, the appellant turned to the Consumer Grievance Redressal Forum (CGRF) to dispute the outstanding amount.

During the CGRF hearing, TANGEDCO officials conducted a Meter Reading Test (MRT) on the appellant's meter. The results revealed that the meter had clocked 1344 unbilled units. As a result, TANGEDCO added an outstanding amount of Rs. 11,599 to the current bill, which resulted in an unusually high bill for the appellant. At the hearing, the appellant claimed that in December 2017, TANGEDCO had changed the meter even though the status of the meter was marked as “normal’ in the consumer ledger, indicating it was functioning accurately. At the time of the meter change, the appellant was billed for 760 units, and the respondent acknowledged the payment. However, five years later, TANGEDCO demanded payment for additional units based on an MRT test on the new meter, alleging that unbilled units were attributed to the appellant.

The appellant argued that the meter removed at his premises was in good condition. The appellant assumes that the meter removed from his premises could have been installed in another service connection and the unbilled units are what were consumed at the new premises. Hence, the appellant requested that the CGRF check the status of the meter and cancel the arrear amount. After considering both sides, the CGRF ruled in favour of TANGEDCO based on the MRT report and instructed the appellant to pay the outstanding amount. Displeased with this decision, the appellant approached the Electricity Ombudsman for redressal.

During the Electricity Ombudsman hearing, the findings were as follows:

- The appellant initially obtained a service connection for a shop under a commercial tariff. It was discovered from the appellant ledger that the appellant's meter was replaced three times within a short period:
  - On 22/10/2016 due to sluggishness
  - On 14/01/2017 due to forward creeping
  - On 25/12/2017 under "normal" circumstances
- On 16/06/2017, the appleant's service connection was disconnected for non-payment of current consumption charges for the billing month of 05/2017 for 760 units.
- The appellants' service connection was reconnected on 25/12/2017 after settling the electricity bills, and the meter was changed under "normal" circumstances during reconnection.
- As per the MRT report, the final reading of the meter was 2104, with the appellant already having paid for 760 units. It was calculated that an additional 1344 units could have been used by the appellant even after the disconnection.
- The electricity usage for March 2017 and May 2017 was recorded at 334 units and 430 units, respectively. Therefore, the unbilled 1344 units could have been used over the three billing periods (07/2017, 09/2017, and 11/2017) when the premise had ostensibly lost its electricity supply.
- During this disconnection period (from 16/06/2017 to 25/12/2017), the respondent requested the appellant to provide evidence of the business operating without TANGEDCO's power supply or evidence of the business being non-functional. However, the appellant provided neither.
- Therefore, the MRT report confirms that the appellant has indeed consumed electricity during the disconnected period.

Findings:

- As per, Section 35 of Evidence Act 1872 "any register or record is evidence under the law of the country". Therefore, the Meter Relay Testing (MRT) division of the licensee (TANGEDCO) is the primary technical authority that will decide the meter's status after conducting a test. The test report is the primary document to determine when there are issues related to meters, such as assessing whether a meter is in good condition or defective. As per the MRT report, the appellant has utilised 1344 units during the disconnection period from 16/06/2017 to 25/12/2017. Therefore, it is found out that the appellant is responsible for paying for the 1333 units.
- According to Regulation 12 of the Tamilnadu Electricity Supply Code, 2004, if the licensee (TANGEDCO) identifies any clerical errors in the amount billed, they have the right to request additional payment for undercharging and should refund any overcharged amount to the customer. In this instance, TANGEDCO discovered clerical errors five years later and demanded payment for the previously unbilled units used during a disconnection period. As a result, TANGEDCO has claimed the outstanding amount.
- The appellant argued that under Section 56(2) of the Electricity Act 2003, any outstanding amount is not recoverable after two years from the initial due date. TANGEDCO referred to a judgment from November 14, 2006, of the Appellate Tribunal for Electricity in appeal Nos. 202 and 203 of 2005 stating that the first due date is considered only after a bill or demand notice is issued. In this case, the appellant consumed unbilled units in 2017, but it was discovered in 2023. The demand notice was served to the appellant in March 2023. According to Section 56(2), the two-year period for recovering the amount began in March 2023.

Based on the above findings, the Electricity Ombudsman confirmed that TANGEDCO raised the arrear amount as per the regulations. Hence the appellant is liable to pay the arrear amount of Rs.11599 and passed the order in favour of TANGEDCO.

SOURCE: OMBUDSMAN CASE

NEWS FROM TAMIL NADU

Tangedco revises charges collected for solar rooftop meters for domestic consumers

The Tamil Nadu Generation and Distribution Corporation (Tangedco) has revised the charges collected from Low Tension consumers (domestic consumers) for three phase meters for solar rooftop installations. In a circular dated May 18, 2024, the Tangedco said that based on the directions of the Tamil Nadu Electricity Regulatory Commission (TNERC), the charges to be collected from consumers who apply for bi-directional meters for solar rooftop systems in Low Tension (LT) services is ₹5,011 and for single phase LT connections, it is ₹2,764. The Tangedco was collecting ₹10,588 from three phase LT consumers so far. The meter charges have been reduced from ₹6,783 to ₹2,610 and it will not collect testing fees any more. The circular also said that in the case of services that have bi-directional meters or programmable bi-directional meters, the charges paid by consumers for the meters cost should be refunded after effecting the solar connection.

In a Right to Information (RTI) reply last month to Coimbatore Consumer Cause, the TNERC said only the registration fees and bi-direction meter cost is to be collected and this is only in places where the conventional meter should be replaced with bi-directional meter supplied by Tangedco.Following this the consumer organisation had appraoched the TNERC about the higher amount collected by Tangedco.

SOURCE: THE HINDU, 21 MAY 2024

NEWS FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Share of non-fossil fuel to grow to 50% in domestic energy generation capacity by 2030: MNRE Secretary

The government aims to raise the share of non-fossil fuel in India's electricity generation capacity to 50% by 2030, according to MNRE Secretary Bhupinder Singh Bhalla. Currently, non-fossil fuel-based capacity constitutes about 42% of India's installed energy generation. Bhalla mentioned this during his address at the World Hydrogen Summit 2024 in Rotterdam, Netherlands, on May 15, 2024. He highlighted a 10.79% increase in non-fossil fuel-based capacity addition in 2023-24 compared to the previous year.

The government aims to increase the share of non-fossil fuel to 50 per cent in the country's total installed electricity generation capacity by 2030, MNRE Secretary Bhupinder Singh Bhalla has said. The share of non-fossil fuel-based capacity in India's installed energy generation capacity is around 42 per cent at present, the official said in a address at the World Hydrogen Summit 2024 in Rotterdam, Netherlands, on May 15, 2024, the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy said in a statement. "Approximately 43 per cent of India's current installed electricity capacity is from non-fossil-fuel sources, with projections indicating a rise to 50 per cent by 2030," he said. As per official figures, there was a 10.79 per cent rise in non-fossil fuel-based capacity (renewable energy sources) addition at 190.57 gigawatt (GW) in 2023-24 over 172.01 GW in 2022-23.

On the progress being made towards The National Green Hydrogen Mission, Bhalla said, "The government has made substantial progress in this regard, having awarded tenders for incentives to support green hydrogen production of a total of 412,000 tonnes per annum. "Additionally, tenders have been awarded for the establishment of electrolyser manufacturing capacity amounting to 1,500 MW per annum, further bolstering India's capacity to produce green hydrogen at scale," he said

SOURCE: THE ECONOMIC TIMES, 16 MAY 2024

WORLD NEWS

EU agrees to quit energy investment treaty over climate concerns

European Union countries unanimously agreed on Thursday to quit an international energy treaty over concerns that it protects fossil fuel investments and undermines efforts to fight climate change, the Belgian EU presidency said. The 1998 Energy Charter Treaty (ECT) allows energy companies to sue governments over policies that damage their investments. In recent years, some companies have used it to launch billion-dollar lawsuits against measures to shut or restrict fossil fuel projects.

"I'm very happy and I will thank all of you around the table to work hard with the Belgian presidency team to break the stalemate on this file," Belgian Energy Minister Tinne Van der Straeten said. Brussels proposed an EU exit from the treaty last year, after member states including Denmark, France, Germany, Luxembourg, Poland, Spain and the Netherlands announced individual plans to quit, with most citing climate change concerns. Before leaving, the EU agreed it will first approve reforms to the treaty - which aimed to make it more climate-friendly, but which some European governments said fell short.

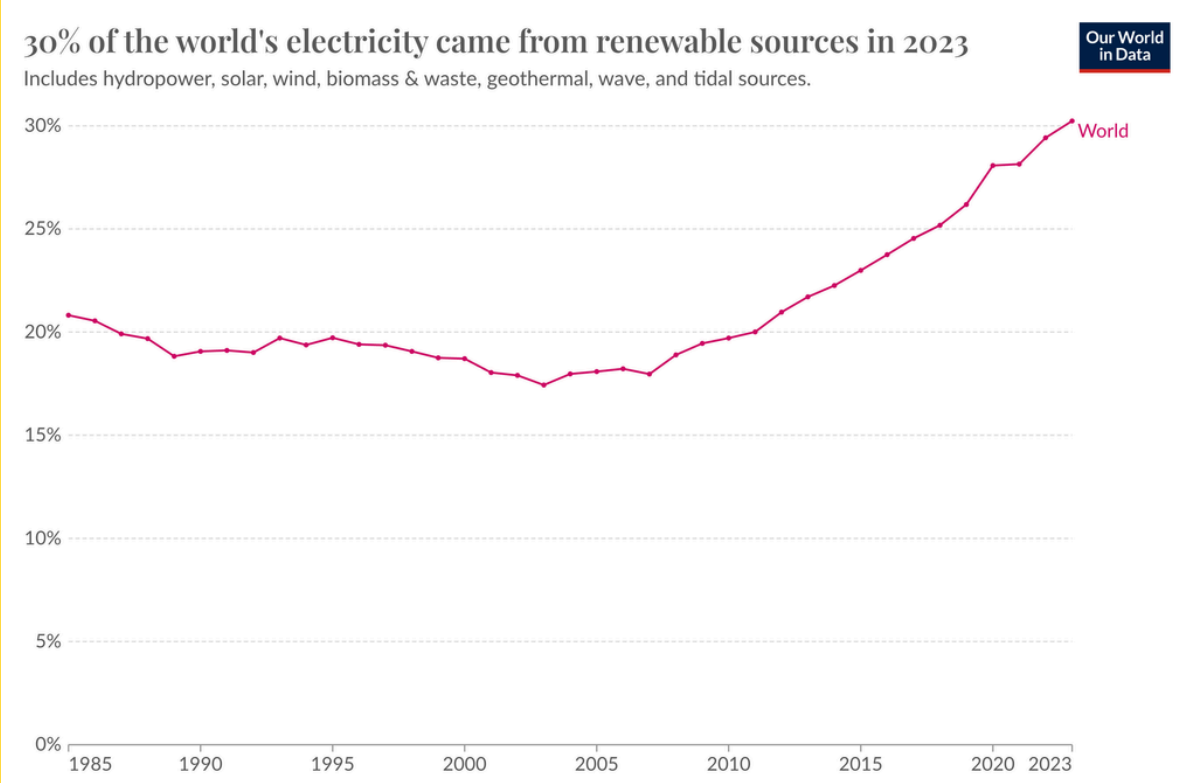
The Energy Charter Treaty secretariat has not yet confirmed when treaty members will meet to vote on the reforms. It did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Around 50 signatories to the treaty agreed the reforms in 2022. One of the key changes is the reduction to 10 years from 20 of a "sunset clause" that would apply to countries that quit. During this period, energy firms from other signatory nations such as Japan and Turkey would continue to receive the treaty's protection of their existing investments in the EU.

SOURCE: REUTERS, 30 MAY 2024

PUBLICATIONS

- Process of Vendor Registration for PM-Surya Ghar Scheme on the National Portal, MNRE
- INNOVATING ENERGY Making cooling energy efficient May 2024, EESL
- Strategies for Affordable and Fair Clean Energy Transitions, IEA
- MAY 2024 Monthly Report of Renewable Generation, CEA

30% OF THE WORLD'S ELECTRICITY CAME FROM RENEWABLE SOURCES IN 2023



SOURCE: OUR WORLD IN DATA

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