

New 5th gate systems 16

The white

Consumers believe the new electricity claim denied by the officials

By Ali Raza

Consumers are not very happy with the high electricity bills and the inefficient service of Lesco. In particular, their complaints are directed at the new electricity meters which they think run faster and force them to pay much higher bills than before. The price of the new meter too is on the higher side, they say. The authorities however strongly deny these claims, holding that they had a scientific way to prove to the consumers that the new meters do not run any faster than the old meters. If anything, they were more accurate and durable.

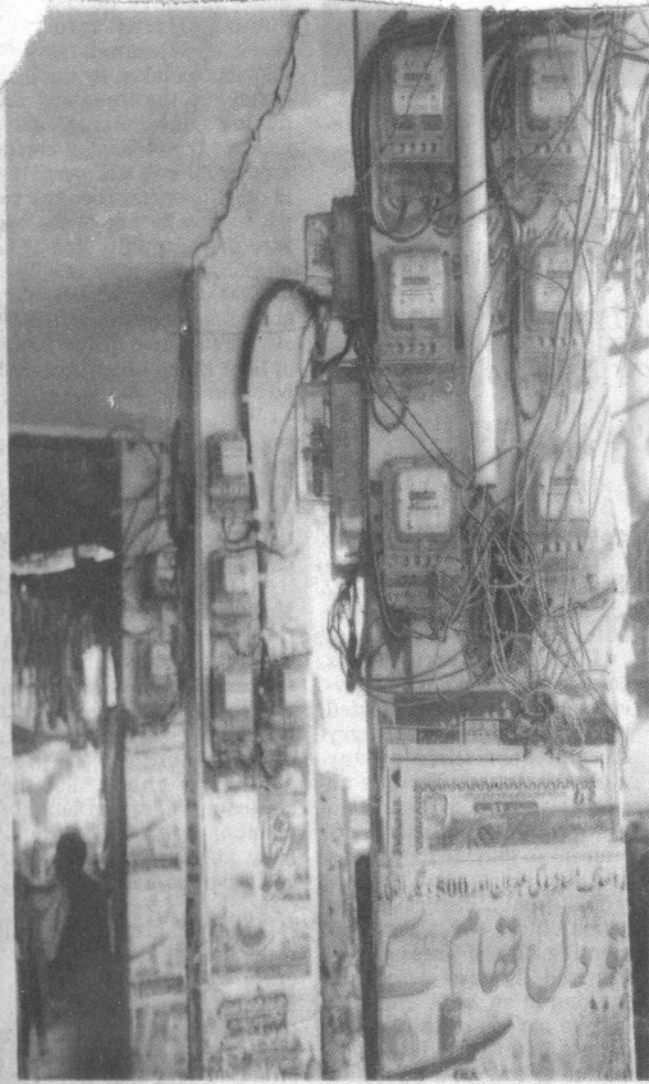
Consumers still demand the old 'black' electricity meters which they think were slower than the new white meters by about 30 to 40 percent because those having black meters are getting less

bills even now.

Abdul Rashid, a resident of Sabzazar, claims that his electricity bill has almost doubled after the concerned sub division changed his old meter with the new white meter. "Earlier, I was paying around Rs 1000 per month in winter season but my bill rose to Rs 1900 this winter," he says.

A number of consumers also demand installation of three-phase energy meters instead of single phase meter. Three phase energy meters do not record passing of current at minor level as they do not start moving if a single tube-light is on. People hold that the new meters, called PC meters, are extra sensitive and record even minor usage of electricity.

Mohammad Saeed, Superintending Engineer Lesco, says that the old black meters were not manufactured according to the international environmental standards and were exposed to



meter race

/ meters have increased the bills, a

dust, dampness, rain etc, which made them sluggish with the passage of time.

He says that PC meters are totally covered and their disc is made with a mixture of metallic and jewel components to keep it moving and accurate whereas the disc of the old black meters was made of jewel bearing, which becomes inaccurate after a passage of time.

"A consumer can easily check whether his meter is accurate or moving fast. The simple formula of checking a meter is lighting a 1000 Watts bulb for an hour as it consumes one unit of electricity if it remains on for full one hour. With this formula consumers can individually check their meters and in case they find them fast they can lodge complaints with their local Lesco subdivision or at the main complaint center established at the Lesco Headquarters," says another senior official, not wishing to be named.

"High power tariff is the real cause of disturbance to the consumers who attribute heavy electricity bills to their meters," says the official. One cause of high electricity bills is the inclusion of taxes and duties levied by the federal government in the electricity bill.

"This is not the consumer's concern. He does not separate government taxes/duties and electricity charges. For people its just the electricity bill," says a consumer Imtiaz Butt who resides in Mughalpora. "Most of the people want some immediate relief because half of their salaries go into utility bills," he says.

It costs around Rs. 3500 to get a new electricity connection at present which includes Rs. 1300 or Rs. 1400 as meter cost. The cost of the meter would have come down if Wapda had purchased the meters at low rates.

Water and Power

Development Authority (Wapda) awarded a tender of 1.2 million meters to a cartel of local companies recently, ignoring a Chinese company which offered less price for these single phase energy meters. Although the price difference was not much for the individual consumer, it must have caused a huge revenue loss to the authority itself.

On the contrary, the authority went for high priced meters by awarding a tender to local cartel at the rate of Rs. 820 instead of the Chinese meters at the rate of Rs. 730 per meter. The chairman Wapda is in on record having said that this was done to protect the local industry.

In Fata, Balochistan and some areas of Sindh, people have opposed the installation of electricity meters and threatened to launch an armed struggle against the Wapda officials who tried to install meters at their houses. Punjab is the only province where people are paying electricity bills without raising any voice against the high electricity tariff.

On the other hand, people are also complaining about the inefficient service of Lesco, in more ways than one. One can witness a number of complainants in the offices of every SDO, XEN

and SE besides a rush of complainants at the office of the chief executive Lesco every day.

People who approach the office of the chief executive Lesco have to wait till after mid-day because the officer does not meet consumers, especially those who have complaints, before this time. Another problem the complainants face is the rough attitude of the concerned officials if they try to meet the Lesco chief earlier than the scheduled time.

Ataullah, a resident of Okara, says he came with a complaint but was not allowed to meet the chief executive and was instructed to wait till 1.30 p.m. He said he had to return to Okara to attend a funeral of one of his relatives and tried to brief the secretary about this but he refused to hear.

Brig Riaz Toor, Chief Executive Lesco, says that the old black meters are mechanical while the new white meters are electronic with a long life. He says, "if anybody's meter is found fast, the company will refund him the extra money he had paid."

About the complaints of the general public, he says that he always tried to resolve the problems of the people immediately and for this purpose he is available day and night.