

What you should know about power

The electricity supply companies (Escoms) in Karnataka have received more brickbats than bouquets from their customers. An independent survey conducted by the Electricity Consumers' Network (ECON) with the assistance of office of Consumer Advocacy of Karnataka Electricity Regulatory Commission (KERC) has revealed that there is a widespread dissatisfaction among the consumers about the quality of power supply, behavior of the staff and half hearted effort to follow the directives issued by the regulator. As a result more than 52 per cent have voted for privatization.

The survey covering nearly 3,000 consumers across the state was conducted to assess the views of consumers about the quality of service, difficulties faced by consumers, awareness about various procedures of Escoms and also matters related to billing, meters, customer charters, complaint handling procedures etc.

One of the major problems of electricity customers relates to quality of power supply. The survey shows that while urban consumers enjoy uninterrupted power supply for almost 24 hours a day, there are rural areas, which receive hardly 3-5 hours of interrupted power supply. More than 90 per cent of the respondents have said that they are experiencing interruptions. Not surprisingly just 18 per cent rated the quality of power supply as 'good'.

There is a directive from KERC to disconnect power supply only after giving advance notice along with reasons for disconnection. But more than 60 per cent of the respondents have said that they do not get any notice before disconnection. If 55 per cent said that late payment was the reason for disconnection, 39 per cent suffered disconnection without any reason. However the Escoms are adhering to the provision of Indian Electricity Act as far as not resorting to disconnection during evenings or night.

All the Escoms have done an excellent job as far as raising bills are concerned. More than 95 per cent of respondents have received the bills regularly in the past one year. Not only raising bills, they have been served to consumers within four days from the date of the bill. However 63 per cent of the respondents have one or the other form of mistakes in their bills. But the Escoms are quick enough to correct the mistakes immediately or on the same day.

Recently KPTCL/ Escoms argued before KERC that it takes 75 days for realizing the amount from customers after supplying power and levying 3 months minimum deposit was reasonable. But the survey indicates that over 80 per cent of the consumers pay through cheque and 8 per cent by Electronic Clearing System.

The KPTCL issued its customer charter in July 2000. Yet even after two years 50 per cent of the respondents are not aware of the charter and copies of the charter is not available for inspection or sale in any of the offices. For a detailed report send your request via email: kerc@vsnl.com. The report will be available in due course on the website: www.ker.org.