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Digital electricity meters

Consumers confounded by new meters

Claim they don't know how to read them; IESCO says all relevant information on back of bills

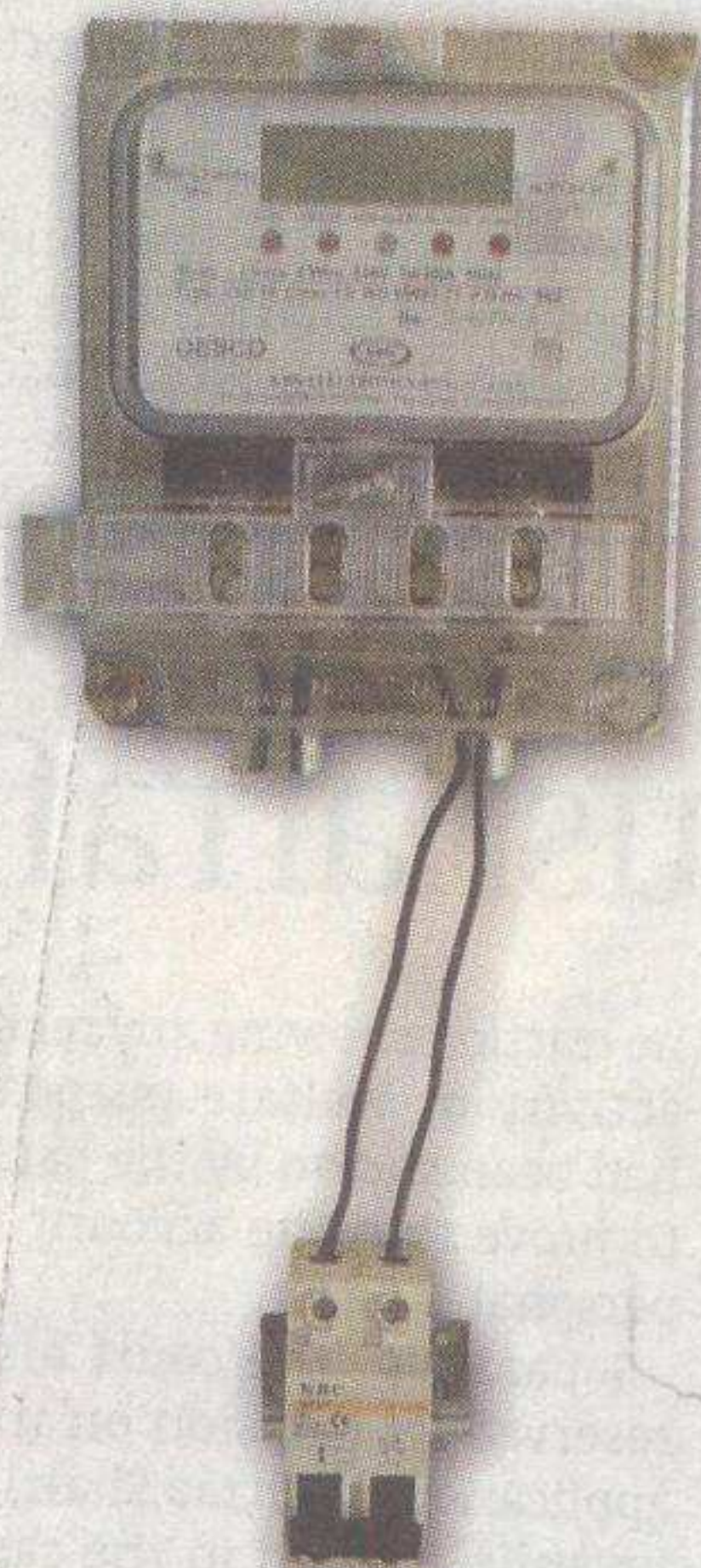
● **OBAID ABBASI**
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Tech-savvy is not a word that can be used to describe most residents of the capital, as a rising number of complaints about digital electricity meters would suggest.

Ever since the Islamabad Electricity Supply Company (IESCO) installed the new meters in different parts of the city, the electricity consumers have been having a hard time reading them. The "various readings on the new meter", some suggest, add to the confusion.

The Network for Consumer Protection (TheNetwork) has also expressed concern over the development.

TheNetwork Executive Coordinator Nadeem Iqbal said the power distribution companies (DISCOs) are sending out



CONFOUNDING: The new meter. PHOTO: THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE

loud messages against the theft but have failed to create an awareness campaign for millions of consumers.

He maintained that the

units reading structure in new meters is quite complex and consumers cannot comprehend it due to a lack of familiarity with the various readings on the meters.

According to him, NEPRA, under the NEPRA Act 1997, is responsible to consult all stakeholders including consumers when determining issues relating to tariffs, billing and meter reading structures. As service providers, DISCOs are obligated to educate consumers on these matters. However, no consultation was done by NEPRA with consumers while mulling over the installation of digital meters, nor were any efforts made by DISCOs to educate them about the reading structures, he said.

Talking to *The Express Tribune*, Danish Hussain, a resident of Sector F-8, said it was good sign that IESCO installed the new meters to overcome electricity theft, but felt that "before installing the meters they should have created awareness among consumers".

“The units reading structure in new meters is quite complex and consumers cannot comprehend it due to a lack of familiarity with it

TheNetwork Executive Coordinator **Nadeem Iqbal**

Similarly, Shabbir Niazi from F-6 said he could not understand how to read the meter in peak hours and low hours because of the complicated procedure.

IESCO Spokesperson Muhammad Farooq said that the company has facilitated the consumers to help them better understand the new meters, noting that all information necessary to understand the new meters has been provided on the back of electricity bills.

Many attempts were made to contact the NEPRA spokesperson but he was not available for comment.