

Maharashtra Electricity Regulatory Commission

DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION









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From the Chairperson's desk



From the Chairperson's desk

Digital.
Determined.
Dynamic.
The Spirit of MERC

The size-to-role ratio of MERC as an organisation is extraordinarily high. The role played by MERC in the 3rd largest state of the country, Maharashtra, is extraordinarily critical. Fulfilling the responsibility of being Regulator for a critical utility such as power, is no mean feat.

For over two decades now, the Commission, the sole regulatory body for several distribution companies, agencies, partners, and end consumers, has been vested with the critical responsibility of functioning seamlessly, with clockwork precision, knowing full well that the outcome of the stipulated activities such as; keeping synergy and preserving balance of scale of the power economy for all involved, enlisted in the commission's KRAs, impacts life at large for millions of stakeholders, year after year.

However, when the pandemic struck the world – for MERC, it could almost be imagined as an obstruction wedged within the gears of a running machine. The consequential restrictions hit the Commission at its most vulnerable stage. And the repercussions of that could have been detrimental at many levels if a strategy wasn't adopted at lightning speed to salvage the situation and keep the system moving forward.

This compilation, a heartfelt narrative, as I hand it over to you with humble pride on behalf of my team that is worthy of the mention, is the story of how a small, close-knit clique of mavericks made the best use of their thinking hats and turned this never-before known situation around, and its unforeseen challenges into something that went well beyond the definition of a rescue or a stop-gap measure.

Sanjay Kumar

Chairperson of the Maharashtra Electricity Regulatory Commission

Not just regulators, but...
The custodians of Maharashtra
Power sector.



Not just regulators, but... The custodians of Maharashtra Power sector.

et us begin by introducing you to who you know as MERC.

Back in 1999, on the 5th of August, The Maharashtra Electricity Regulatory Commission (MERC) was constituted to be led by The Chairperson and two members under the Electricity Regulatory Commissions (ERC) Act, 1998, and is presently performing its function under The Electricity Act, 2003.

Just to give you the general idea of the vast and critical role of this not-so-expansive Commission - it has three-fold functions: (i) quasi-judicial; (ii) quasi-legislative and (iii) executive. The Commission is responsible for the issuance of licence for transmission, distribution, and trading of electricity, determination of the tariff for generation, transmission, and distribution of electricity, promotion of competition, efficiency, and economy in the activities of the electricity industry, promotion of co-generation and generation of electricity from renewable sources of energy, adjudication of disputes, specification of standards with respect to quality, continuity & reliability of service, advice to the State Government under Section 86 (2) etc.

It would be easier to now comprehend what MERC does with clockwork precision, while living up to this extraordinary responsibility with unflinching dedication, supreme care for details and a future-forward attitude. MERC plays an existentially critical role in ensuring that every power distribution company in the state of Maharashtra that endeavours to light up homes and businesses, keeps the economy flourishing, generations progressing - does so in a correct, balanced manner - that is ultimately aligned with the advantage of the end-consumer.

Not just regulators, but... The custodians of Maharashtra Power sector.



Interestingly, the process for most of the above functions required MERC to deliver its verdict after hearing the concerned parties or stakeholders through processe which include filing of Petition, serving of notice, hearing of the cases and issuance of Order. Certain issues, such as determination of tariff, also required conducting Public Hearings to lend the opportunity to the general public to raise objections / suggestions on the proposed tariff. What it essentially means is that traditionally MERC operated largely in the physical domain with a lot of one-on-one or group contact, meetings, gatherings, hearings.

In these processes, Regulations required Petitioner or Respondent, or objector to file their submission in hard copies. These submissions were to be then served to the other parties in time so that they got sufficient time to respond. Throughout its existence, *MERC has been entrusted with the Issuance of notices / orders in hard copies*.

To add to that the Petitioner or the Respondents would be required to travel all the way to the Office of the Commission in Colaba, Mumbai to attend such a hearing. And further due to non-receipt of submission by another party, hearings on several occasions had to be accommodated to be adjourned to the next date.

The Commission had been using emails for official and daily business communications with all its other stakeholders and parties, with greater reliance on hard copies. Considering delays in the adjudication process on account of non-receipt of submission by other parties, the Commission was already in the process of adopting digital technology.

Not just regulators, but... The custodians of Maharashtra Power sector.

The Central Electricity Regulatory Commission that had already launched its 'SAUDAMINI' portal for e-filing of Petition in the year 2017 – collaborated and cooperated with MERC to start developing its own e-filing portal.

Over two decades now the Commission under the tenures of various eminent Chairpersons and members, as everyone knows, was an amazing journey. MERC has made several strides in its course, constantly evolving and advancing through an ever-changing, ever-dynamic landscape of needs in the power sector.

MERC has conducted itself meticulously, using measures, means and tools, just like the whole world did using the available, tested and tried technologies to communicate, document, operate, execute – wherein the processes in case of MERC such as filings etc., mandatorily depended on hard copies and hearings/public hearings were conducted physically.



Everything was fine.
Until it was not.

Digital. Determined. Dynamic. The Spirit of MERC

The organisation operating with perfect finesse for more than two decades, mainly to regulate the purchase, sale, distribution of electricity, a critical component of sustenance and growth in this modern world - found itself in a quagmire that made it difficult to the point of impossible, to conduct the set order of business, as they had known it for years.

Amongst a myriad important responsibilities MERC handles, the most elaborate, and the most critical task 'is' releasing the Multi Year Tariff (MYT) Order.

MYT Order is the most important deliverable for any electricity regulatory Commission in the country because it is about giving out tariff orders which will impact crores of consumers, to be handed over on the 31st of March.

In this grand ritual for MERC, usually the last 10 days before the March-end deadline of issuance of the tariff order are the most critical, hectic & decisive days, because getting the annual tariff order ready-for-release is an extremely nuanced and multi-level task. Then in the last 3-4 days before the 31st of March, after several rounds of discussions, and even many more rounds of iterations and very high-level deliberations - the tariff order is arrived at.

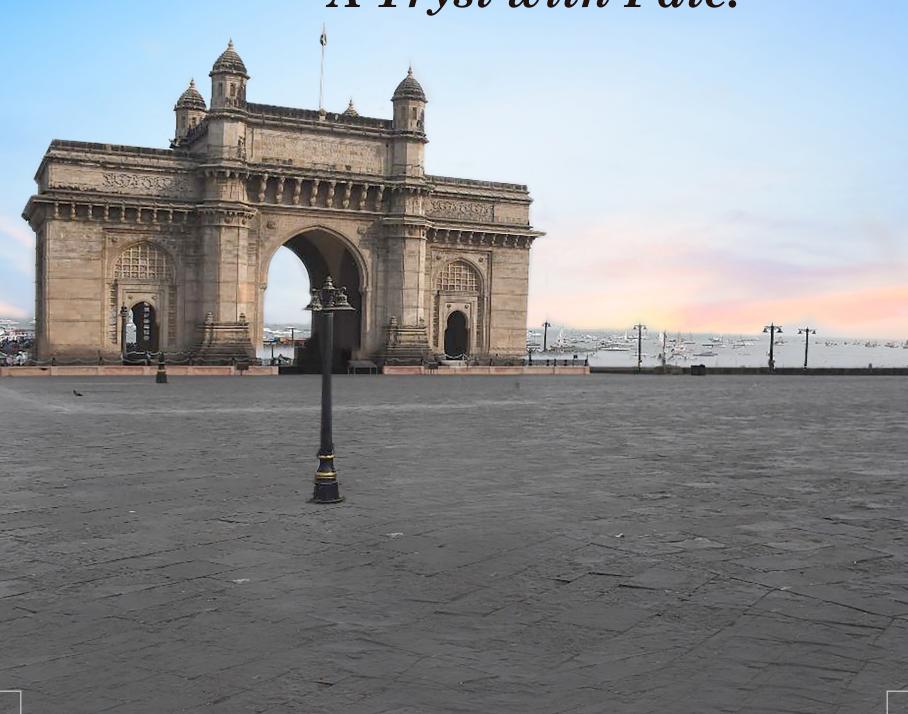
During the Multi Year Tariff Order activity, the entire department works on adrenaline and speed, to help the Commission deliver the tariff order that is in the best interest of everyone involved starting with electricity consumers to the licensees.

So, in March 2020 everybody once again dived deep into the euphoric phase of preparing for the tariff order for the new financial year. The usual rush set in everywhere. The usual shuttling in and out of the office. The long hours spent deliberating on the road to important decisions. Papers, files, e-mails, meetings... Life was in its 'March-mode' as always, with that one date in sight - 31st of March 2020 for the new tariff to be declared. But little did anyone imagine that there was another date in March just before, that will turn their mundane world upside down.

A Date.







A Date. A Tryst with Fate.



n the 24th of March of 2020, the world plunged into an abyss.

Now the consequences of the lockdown and the progression of the pandemic are something we all know about. The focus of our story is actually on the date that the lockdown was enforced - exactly six days away from the deadline of the new tariff declaration and, how MERC set new normal for its working.

Here is what it effectively meant for MERC.

This was an organisation that greatly depended on the conventional, physical ways of working. Files needed to be maintained and circulated for physical updates, and signatures. Teams needed to physically convene for critical meetings. People needed, most importantly trusted, face to face conversations due to the high degree of confidentiality and sensitivity of the records and data being handled.

For those who, for decades, relied on the comfort of conventional techniques and got used to the traditional processes of doing their jobs – just six days before the most important day of the year – were all of a sudden thrown into the shadows of the 'unknown'.



A Date. A Tryst with Fate.



It was not just about the internal stakeholders of MERC to be hit by this lockdown. The impending chaos was also looming large on the innumerable external stakeholders, licensees, various associates, consultants, agencies, legal aides, and not to forget the most important of them, the customers - who were also completely aligned with the conventional processes of the organisation and its functioning.

With everything coming to a screeching halt, and absolutely no preparation whatsoever to counter this contingency barely six days away, it turned into a matter of delivering a critical deliverable - that is, the new tariff for the year '20-'21!





"Change. Invokes resistance."

As the clock ticked away mercilessly, team MERC, probably unlike any commercial entity in the country had the most perilous task ahead to deliver to the expectations of millions of stakeholders.

Think of it like climbing the most treacherously high and cold peak, with no map or gear. The sole goal was to reach the summit and achieve the supposedly 'unachievable'.

It was an unavoidable realisation that everything in the world had changed. Everything around and about the lives at MERC had changed. And the conscious decision awaited, whether the entire universe of MERC would adapt to and enforce this life-altering change or not! Whether they will endure and acclimate to the radically new ways of doing things. Ways so new that they might err or fail or impact results in the long run. Was MERC ready to evolve in the face of such global adversity?



"Change. Invokes resistance."



Was MERC prepared to align with the forces that brought about drastic tectonic shifts in the known planes of its existence?

Human history will vouch for the fact that 'change' more often than not is either met with resistance, nonchalance, or fear. This was no different an experience for MERC.

For all those who felt the older, prevailing systems and processes were infallible, a physical signature to be of more value than a digital signature, locking a file in the locker or a cabinet to be safer than in the cloud, transactions were more trustworthy via cheques than online transfers, physical meetings to be more efficient and decisive way of doing the job—were suddenly brought to the harsh realisation that most of how they operated was, going forward—'not an option'!



When going went tough, MERC went tougher.

ationwide Lockdown on account of Covid-19 was imposed on 24 March 2020. Prior to that the Commission has ceased the matter related to Multi Year Tariff (MYT) Orders of around 21 entities. These MYT Orders were to be issued by 31 March 2020 so that they could be made effective from 1 April 2020. Although MYT Orders were on the verge of finalization, discussion on critical points was still pending. However, due to the imposition of lockdown, physical meeting (which was normal practice in the process, in the past) was clearly an impossibility.

So, team MERC sprung into a tactical mode and put together a whole strong set of strategic & technical experts, entrusted with just one, clear brief - "to switch the entire functioning of MERC to the digital platforms and make sure everything transcends seamlessly into the realms of technology."

Every piece of information, data, operation, execution, deliberation that required a physical mode of conduct was to be brought over onto the digital universe. Of course, the good old emails remained relevant and in use. But pretty much everything else warranted an immediate change.

For this team, for the sake of collective success, not finding an efficient workaround was not an option. Not delivering on time was not an option. Failing was definitely not an option.

So, this team mapped out a battle plan against the pandemic restrictions. They plunged into researching every available digital tool, method, process available in the existing world of technology to find the best options that could be adopted across board - internally and externally as well. Options that would be easy and quick to implement, comprehend and follow through in the long run. Though everyone was accustomed to the convenience of some of the most popular messaging apps, their voice and video calling features,

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the much publicised and globally used conferencing platforms... The critical issue was to find a safer and secure option to conduct the Commission's confidential transactions specially to handle the finalisation of the impending Multi Year Tariff Order.

Email continued to be used for circulating issues/notes for pre-reads, but the in-person discussions and meetings were seamlessly done with multiple stakeholders and parties using conference calls over the various tech-platforms.

Despite the fact that bringing so many stakeholders onto a change, in such a short stipulation, is no mean feat... With all these efforts, MYT Orders were issued on the 30th March 2020 well within the stipulated target date. This was just the start of using digital technology in the functioning of the Commission. And all of this was done successfully not by side-lining the worries or dissent but by honouring and integrating everyone's opinion, apprehensions, and doubts.



Things may come to those who wait... But only the things left by those who hustle.



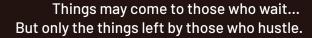
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Although MYT Order had been announced, during the covid period MERC kept receving petitions from stakeholders on email. Some of it had requests for urgent listing/hearing. Hence there was no time to wait but at the same time the restrictions, lockdown, no physical gatherings, no human contact were all a harsh reality. Yet MERC's job had to be done, no questions asked. A job that entailed processes to be implemented across a diverse cross section of stakeholders - internal and external. The distribution companies, end consumers, partners, vendors, employees, consultants & such others!

So, let us take you through team MERC's new action plan to overcome the hurdles of physical hearing amidst the severe restrictions implemented through the long-extended pandemic. For operations to run smoothly across various cross-sections of audiences without the physical hearings, the Commission had to ensure minimal to no frictions or hurdles. The transition of execution had to be error-free.

As we know by now, prior to the period of Covid-19 pandemic, the Commission was conducting its hearing physically in the Courtroom of the Commission. Due to various restrictions at the outset of the pandemic, hearings in all the State Commissions had come to a halt.

A halt that hadn't been foreseen. A halt that just couldn't exist. So, team MERC took it up as an objective to ensure that the Commission could ensure stakeholder participation in hearing through electronic platforms without requiring travel to Mumbai to attend a hearing. This amazing team also saw to it that no one felt left behind in catching up with all of this change, all of a sudden.





On the 11th of May 2020, the Commission issued directions for hearing urgent matters through Video Conferencing mode. Salient features of that practice directions are as follows:

- Stakeholders could file scanned copies of their Petition/ Application / Submission through email with the undertaking that hard copy will be submitted once physical functioning of MERC office resumed.
- Links for participating in e-hearing to be issued to concerned parties. Others could witness e-hearing through a live streaming link available on MERC website.
- For participating advocates/ representatives of parties in e-hearing, test-run to be conducted one or two days in advance to make them familiar with the e-hearing process.

Based on the above practice direction, the first e-hearing was held on 14th May 2020. Thus within 1.5 months of imposition of nationwide lockdown, by use of digital technology, the Commission resumed the hearing process.

After gaining experience of conducting smooth e-hearing in 72 matters within 2 months and considering positive feedback from stakeholders, on the 13th July 2020 MERC extended the above practice direction (dated 11th May 2020) fort e-hearing of all matters without restricting to only to the urgent matters.

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Thereafter, on 17th September 2020 E-Hearing platform was opened for public hearing also wherein any person could request for the opportunity to speak.

Since the initiation of e-hearing in May 2020 till February 2021, the Commission had already conducted smooth e-hearing sessions for around 200 cases. Many stakeholders then requested the Commission to continue this process of e-hearing which resulted in the saving of resources and time for them by avoiding the travel that was earlier required for the physical hearings. Considering such benefits of e-hearing, the Commission vide Practice Direction dated 18th February 2021 issued protocol for Hybrid Hearing, wherein e-hearing was instituted as a default option except for specific request from any party that the Commission may allow for a physical hearing, case to case basis.

With enabling of e-hearing platforms as above, and efforts taken by MERC IT Team to provide test runs before each e-hearing, all e-hearings were conducted smoothly except for one or two occasions when there arose difficulties at parties' end. In that case, the Commission pushed the scheduled e-hearing to the next date.

Parallel to the improvisations made with regards to the e-hearing platform, work on e-filing platform was also running full swing. Beta version of e-filing platform was launched on 1st May 2021. The Commission made e-filing mandatory alongside the hard copy filing.

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On 15th August 2021, the final version of e-filing was launched. Petition is needed to file first on e-filing Platform and then only one hard copy was required to be submitted to the MERC Office. For persons who did not have access to digital technology, MERC IT Team converted its petition in digitized format and uploaded it on the e-filing platform.

Use of e-filing portal ensured that once a submission was uploaded on the portal, it became available to all parties concerned with that case. Hence, the issue of the involved/responsible parties not getting a copy of any submission was very smartly eliminated.

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 lockdown MERC issued various practice directions such as the ones explained above, to incorporate digital technology in filing and hearing on Petitions. To incorporate all of these in its Conduct of Regulations, the Commission prepared and issued draft Regulations on the 18thJune 2022. After due public consultation process, the Commission notified MERC (Transaction of Business and Fees and Charges) Regulations 2022 on the 18thOctober 2022.

Thereafter as required under the Regulations, on 14th November 2022, Practice Direction giving operational procedure for filing and hearing on Petition was issued with following important features:

- a. Petition to be mandatorily filed on e-filing portal. No hard copy be filed.
- b. E-Hearing to be the default option for hearing. However, the Commission could allow specific requests of any party for physical hearing.

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- c. Public Hearing to also be conducted through e-hearing only. If required, the Commission could set up facilitation centers at different locations to enable and ease the access for stakeholders wishing to participate in e-public hearing.
- d. All e-hearings to be live streamed through a link available on the MERC website. Which effectively meant that anybody could witness any e-hearing through that link on MERC website.

In addition to e-hearing, the Commission used video conferencing platform to conduct meetings on various issues such as:

- a. Unrest in consumers due to average billing during Covid-19 pandemic due non-availability of meter reading in lockdown period.
- b. Meeting related to Mumbai Partial Grid Failure that occurred on 12th October 2020 and consequent proceeding of High-Level Committee, constituted to enquire & suggest remedial action to avoid such failures in the future.
- c. Implementation of Deviation Settlement Mechanism at SLDC by regular meetings with software implementation partners and all stakeholders (generator & discoms).

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Adopting the new methodologies and adapting for maximum efficiencies while racing against time was a show of gumption, steadfastness and enterprise in terms of compliance and ensuring the safety of all involved. The idea behind every step taken was to comply with the national policies without compromising the critical responsibility that MERC had upon itself.

So, to begin with, the Commission opened up its hearing sessions (erstwhile conducted physically) to all stakeholders by way of live streaming it on the MERC website, so that a large number of stakeholders could also witness e-hearings. What this eventually and gradually helped achieve, as a bonus, was a greater, much greater number of participants accessing the e-hearings and these online sessions becoming way more participative, interesting, productive than the historically known physical hearings! This was an unexpected turn of events. What was kickstarted as an alternative methodology to overcome a pandemic-led crisis was soon seen to have become a serendipitous discovery, almost as though the next natural success milestone - waiting round the corner!

This proof of success was a major boost to the morale of the Commission. Hence the Commission decided to foray in the direction of a major rehaul of processes. In that endeavour, it continued adopting various technological solutions to increase transparency and participation, consistently ensuring ease of access for stakeholders to the hearing / public hearing process.

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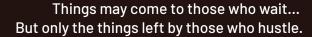
The fact that an end-consumer, in some far-flung town of Maharashtra could now, within the comfort of his locality, access an MERC hearing tturned out to be a blessed relief for him! He could simply click the link provided by MERC and actively participate in the sessions. He could put forth his case without any hassle of travel, stay, wait, sitting amidst another hundred odd attendees - was a massive, absolutely humongous relief and a win - for both, the Commission, and the consumer!

For the sake of convenience of the stakeholders, the Commission formulated practice directions and guidance notes for smooth conduct of hearing, stipulating the process and do's & don't to be followed during e-hearing / e-public hearing process.

It was the irrefutable proof that oftentimes, the horizon of possibilities stretches beyond the visible range of our sight. We cannot and must not give up trying, especially in the face of adversities and challenges, even if there is ever so the slightest possibility of failing. We wouldn't know if we wouldn't try!

MERC's speedy, resolute, unswerving attitude is an example of this fact of life -that will serve to be an example at an individual and organisational level for a long time to come.

Energised by the manner in which this rehauling and revamping of the processes with newer and better technological advancements struck success at a steady pace - the Commission has gone ahead now making e-hearing the default feature of its functioning - considering the associated benefits to the stakeholders, internal and external alike.



By now, having conducted more than 1000 e-hearings and around 50 e-public hearings without any complaint relating to accessibility of electronic platforms - the Commission has established this new normal with a resounding success, allaying all fears and apprehensions in the minds of the stakeholders about confidentiality, security of critical data, ease of operation and navigation. The Commission has brought all generations of stakeholders aboard this fantastic next-gen tech-led progression.

As a proof of this, several stakeholders have expressed their satisfaction and appreciation about the ease and effectiveness of use of this electronic platform, which has enabled the Commission to reach up to the doorstep of consumers / stakeholders.

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Introducing some of the patrons and their words of appreciation for MERC's innovative approach!

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The efforts taken by MERC in improvement of the working procedures are remarkable especially the e-hearing procedure implemented during the Covid period. Not only it has helped to tide over the difficult Covid times in terms of avoiding human gathering but has also helped keep pace with the



changing technological times. The e-hearings have been very useful as it has simplified the filing procedures and made it very discrete and understandable. It provides the option of submission in soft format thereby not only being environment friendly but also hassle-free.

Participants are able to attend the hearings from the comfort of their offices while being able to listen clearly all the words being said. It has alleviated the pain of heavy traffic during peak morning hours and saved valuable time that was otherwise wasted in travelling.

MERC has always been avant-garde in all matters of electricity regulations and has been guiding organization to many other ERCs in the country.

I wish all the BEST to MERC, the pioneering organization in the electricity sector.

Lokesh Chandra IAS

General Manager BRIHAN - MUMBAI ELECTRIC SUPPLY & TRANSPORT UNDERTAKING



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This hybrid mode of Public Hearing pioneered by MERC is an example to emulate not only for other SERCs but also for many other judicial/quasi-judicial proceedings that require public participation. It has certainly saved thousands of man-hours, travel time, travel cost for many



stakeholders and thereby also helped to save fuel/carbon emissions associated with such travel. I extend my compliments to entire team of MERC for this regulatory process innovation and my organisation (MSEDCL) is proud to be part of this pioneering initiative of MERC!!

Vijay Singhal, IAS

Chairman and Managing Director, MSEDCL





" E-hearings conducted by Maharashtra Electricity Regulatory Commission offer numerous benefits: enhanced accessibility, cost-effective proceedings, reduced travel time, increased efficiency, improved transparency, and convenience for stakeholders. Embracing digital platform for public hearing ensures a swift and



inclusive decision-making process, ultimately fostering a more robust and customer-centric electricity regulatory framework."

Mr Kandarp Patel

MD & CEO - Adani Electricity



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Enabling e-hearings to meet stakeholder needs, the Hon'ble Commission has shown exemplary agility. This ensured smooth and uninterrupted functioning of the Commission during Covid without comprising on safety of any of the participants. It was heartening to see consumers from remote villages participate in hearings and put their point across directly to the Commission. The entire process of representation



before the Hon'ble Commission has become more seamless and coherent. There will also be a positive impact on the environment due to savings of paper and the carbon footprint of physical travel. The Tata Power Team is thankful to the Hon'ble MERC for contributing towards the vision of a "Digital and Sustainable India".

Dr. Praveer Sinha

CEO & Managing Director of The Tata Power Company Limited





During covid pandemic physical hearing were not possible hence Commission started virtual on line hearings of petitions using advanced technology and it went on smoothly. The quality of the orders of the Commission has improved technically and legally. The benefits of virtual hearings are timely hearing, time saved during hearing, quick resolution



of cases, good number of cases are disposed in a day, travelling and expenditure of petitioners is saved, petitioner may attend hearing from comfort of his home or office. I wish the virtual hearing should be continued and Commission will protect the interest of consumers as well as will take a balanced approach in future also as it was doing in past.

R B Goenka

Vice president, Vidarbha Industries Association



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I compliment MERC for continuing this journey by undertaking 'E-hearing' initiative. 'E-hearings' have made it easier for consumers and other stakeholders spread across Maharashtra to participate in the regulatory proceedings. It has also enhanced transparency as any interested party



can observe the proceeding and get a better understanding of regulatory orders. Maharashtra is the only state that undertakes such live streaming of hearing. I would like to especially express my appreciation for the entire IT team of the commission and others involved in this initiative who have ensured smooth 'e-hearings' without any glitches. This has been possible due to thoughtful measures such as pre-hearing testing, video, and other explainer documents, and more importantly very approachable IT team during the hearing that promptly resolves any technical issues. I am sure that with foundational initiatives such as 'e-hearing' and 'e-filing' being in place, MERC will set new standards for transparency and accessibility of all regulatory proceedings and petitions by all stakeholders. I once again compliment MERC Chairperson, Members, Secretary, Directors, and the entire team for this initiative.

Shantanu Dixit,

Member, Prayas (Energy Group)



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MERC took on the responsibility to ensure through its virtual hearings, proper access to all stakeholders, including consumers, to the regulatory as well as adjudicatory proceedings. The arrangements made, evolved in record time, into smooth remote access proceedings, ensuring full



transparency. The whole process and the platform created has continued with clockwork precision, involving the principles and protocols, to ensure participation of all stakeholders, who may or may not be tech savvy.

The remote access proceedings which emanated and structured, due to the unprecedented situation, have now become an excellent and effective platform for conducting proceedings, ensuring accessibility and traversing beyond the physical confines.

The impeccable platform to me is one of the best in the country which provides a virtual hearing system. The recent impetus given by the Hon'ble Supreme Court to ensure that virtual hearings continue, and the infrastructure is not dismantled, is truly reflected in letter and spirit in continuation of this modern technology enabled platform, educed by MERC.

Deepa Chawan

Advocate



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The Covid-19 pandemic forced courts and legal practitioners across the world to shift their operations to virtual mode for conducting court hearings. India was no exception to this trend. Virtual hearings have made it easier for lawyers, judges, witnesses, and litigants to attend court



proceedings from anywhere in the world. This has eliminated the need to travel to the court premises physically, saving time and money.

This change has also made justice more accessible to people living in remote areas, who had limited access to courts previously. A paradigm in respect of Virtual Hearings is the procedure adopted by the Maharashtra Electricity Regulatory Commission (MERC). MERC has been conducting E-hearings since the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic and has evolved a formal Operational Procedure and Protocol on 14th November 2022.

The Protocol of MERC should be seen as an ideal model which ought to be followed by other Commissions and Courts as well. This will help in the digitalisation of the Indian Judicial system by making justice more accessible, efficient and cost effective.

Shri Venkatesh Advocate



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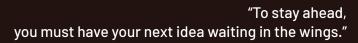


To stay ahead, you must have your next idea waiting in the wings.

n November 2022, 24 Petitions for Mid Term Review (MTR) under MERC MYT Regulations 2019 were filed which needed to undergo the Public Hearing process. As tariff determination process is of vital importance to all consumers, public hearings on these petitions witnessed large consumer participation. The same was expected for the upcoming tariff determination process.

Hence, the Commission took the following special efforts for smooth conduct of e-public hearing on Tariff Petitions and also issued Guidance Note dated 23rd January 2023:

- E-Public Consultation Tab was made available on the MERC website to enable the consumers to submit their suggestions and objections online. The option of submitting a hard copy of suggestion and objection was continued.
- b. For someone who has opted to speak during the e-public hearing, the Commission conducted a test run session a couple of days in advance, to familiarize them with the e-hearing platform and its working.
- c. E-Public Hearing was live streamed on MERC website so that anybody could witness the same.
- d. In addition to Mumbai, e-facilitation centers were set up at the 6 revenue headquarters in Maharashtra. Which enabled the consumers without access to digital technology, to visit such facilitation centers and participate in the e-hearing.





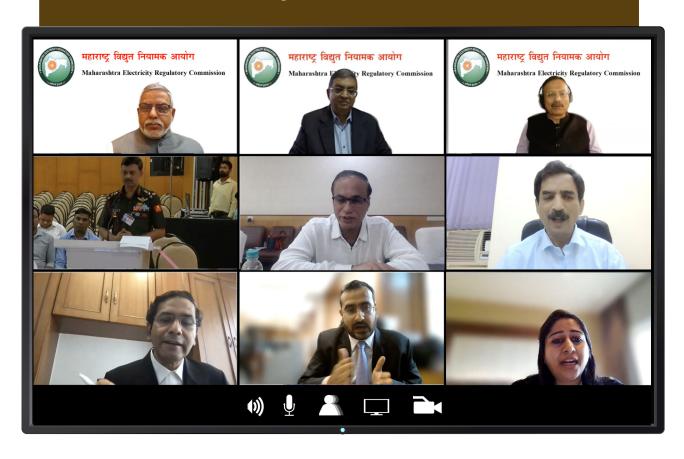
- e. Discom was directed to prepare video and animated film to explain the process of filing suggestions and objections, and e-hearing to general consumers. Said video animated film was uploaded on Discom and MERC websites.
- f. Those who expressed their wish to speak during the hearing were also allowed to do so during that day or on the next date of e-hearing.

All above efforts have resulted in larger public participation. Suggestions and abjections recived during MSEDCL's e-public hearing was three times more than that recived during the previous physical hearings.

Also, many consumers opted to participate in e-public hearing from their own facilities, saving their time and resources for travelling physically to the physical location of hearing. Use of such technological solutions enabled the Commission to reach up to the doorstep of many more.

To stay ahead, you must have your next idea waiting in the wings.

E-Public Hearing for Kokan region on 21/02/2023.



Total 2281 suggestions & objections received in Kokan Region. Out of which 108 candidates expressed their wish to speak.

"To stay ahead, you must have your next idea waiting in the wings."

E-Public Hearing for Pune region on 23/02/2023



Total 3360 suggestions & objections received in Pune Region. Out of which 406 candidates expressed their wish to speak.

To stay ahead, you must have your next idea waiting in the wings.

E-Public Hearing for Aurangabad region on 25/02/2023



Total 362 suggestions & objections received in Aurangabad Region. Out of which 218 candidates expressed their wish to speak.

"To stay ahead, you must have your next idea waiting in the wings."

E-Public Hearing for Nasik region on 27/02/2023



Total 1212 suggestions & objections received in Nasik Region. Out of which 272 candidates expressed their wish to speak.

To stay ahead, you must have your next idea waiting in the wings.

E-Public Hearing for Amravati region on 02/03/2023



Total 180 suggestions & objections received in Amravati Region. Out of which 16 candidates expressed their wish to speak.

"To stay ahead, you must have your next idea waiting in the wings."

E-Public Hearing for Nagpur region on 03/03/2023



Total 469 suggestions & objections received in Nagpur Region. Out of which 39 candidates expressed their wish to speak.

To stay ahead, you must have your next idea waiting in the wings.



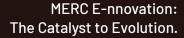


MERC E-nnovation: The Catalyst to Evolution.



hat follows is an interesting account of the benefits reaped by various stakeholders, thanks to the use of such technological solutions:

- A) Improved transparency: All e-hearing / e-public hearings were live telecast through a link available on the MERC Website. Thus, as against the limited people who could previously witness physical hearing in court rooms, now, many more can witness the same at their convenience on their mobile/computer from any place.
- B) Facility to Test Run: Before every e-hearing test runs made participants familiar with the e-hearing platform. Arrangements to allow only registered parties to participate in e-hearing and others to witness e-hearing through link available on MERC Website ensured no interruptions and smooth conduct of the e-hearing.
- C) Demystifying the hearing process: As stakeholders are attending e-hearings from their place, they have more resources at their end to make effective submissions during the hearings. Such technological solutions have allowed the Commission to reach up to the doorstep of stakeholders.
- D) Ease of Document/ File Sharing: Option of sharing documents during e-hearing process enabled focused hearing, and improved the understanding of others witnessing these e-hearings as they may not have such documents with them for reference.





- E) Minimizing physical resources Optimizing efficiency: From 6 hard copies required under earlier Regulations, the Commission moved to "only e-filing" of Petition, removing requirement of any hard copy whatsoever. This has not only brought down the wastage of paper, thus saving trees, but the e-filing platform ensures that once any document is uploaded, it is available to all concerned parties in that matter. Hence, the issue of delay in serving the copies has been eliminated.
- from all over the suburbs of Mumbai and MMR areas to attend office / hearing. Use of digital tools and work-from-home options effectively reduced traveling during pandemic. At the same time, the Commission continued all its functions, digitally. During the pandemic year of FY 2020-21, case-disposal rate was at a high of 67%, almost as good as the previous year's disposal rate of 71%. Thus, lockdown and pandemic failed to stop the Commission from performing its duties. Contrarily, it performed to the efficiencies while reaching more of its consumers in the safest mode.
- G) Shrinking Distance Expanding Connect: People no more need to travel to Mumbai from across India to attend the hearings. They could attend such sessions on the e-public hearing platform. This not only saved their travel time and resources but also enabled them to maximize their time for other commitments.

MERC E-nnovation: The Catalyst to Evolution.





Success is incomplete without a future plan for its continuity.

t is success, only if it is sustainable and continuous

This resolve was not only successfully executed but also evolved into this completely new, "efficient at a whole-different-level" kind of an entity - that has become an example in the industry for others to take inspiration from. For the resilience, forward-thinking and efficiency of execution exhibited by the tight and close-knit team of MERC, it's truly an episode of awakening for everyone.

Thus, we take this opportunity to document this course-altering, belief-changing experience though thus humble compilation. May this narrative serve as an inspiration to organisations in moments/times in life when moving forward hits a no-go.

No matter how small or large an entity is, where there is will, there is way. And this document is a testament of MERC's resilience and resolve to find a way around when there was way through.



Driving Force Behind MERC's Digital Transformation







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