



## ■ ยกระดับบริการทางการแพทย์



คณะแพทยศาสตร์ รพ.รามธิบดี ม.มหิดล ร่วมกันกับ คณะกรรมการกิจการกระจายเสียง กิจการโทรทัศน์ และกิจการโทรคมนาคมแห่งชาติ (กสทช.) แถลงข่าว “โครงการสนับสนุนการเชื่อมต่อด้วยเทคโนโลยี Wifi 6E เพื่อยกระดับการบริการและการศึกษาทางการแพทย์” เพื่อผสานเทคโนโลยีการเชื่อมต่อด้วย Wifi 6E เข้ากับองค์ความรู้ทางการแพทย์ร่วมกัน มาใช้ในการดูแลรักษาพยาบาลผู้ป่วย พัฒนาระบบการดูแลรักษาผู้ป่วย ยกย่องระดับการบริการและการศึกษาทางการแพทย์

# *I know a power bill con when I see one*



An electricity metre and electrical substation, superimposed on one another. 123F.COM

## COMMENTARY

Anchalee  
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**W**hat is your reaction when seeing the latest electricity bill? For me, I was shocked, and I believe I am not alone here. Even I am fully aware that this summer is unusually hot and all households crank up their air-con.

Still, my bill for March and April is almost double the normal level, so much so that these bills appear like a scam.

But what makes me really angry is reading comments from the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (Egat) governor who told people not to panic over their expensive electricity bills.

On April 25, Egat governor Boonyanit Wongrukmit posted on Facebook showing his monthly bills for February and March that rose substantially. Regardless, the Egat governor seems cool with his electricity bill.

“My house uses more electricity too. So be logical, be calm and scientific. When you consume more electricity, you end up paying more,” he wrote.

In case you don’t know, Egat is a highly profitable state enterprise whose profit in 2021 reached 25 billion baht. It lavishes perks on its staff that are the envy of ordinary wage workers.

Before 1995, Egat staff received a subsidy of 10,000 baht on their electricity use.

After that rule was scrapped, part of the subsidy was reported to have been factored into their monthly salary. So I wonder how many perks the Egat governor and his staff get now?

Electricity fees and how to calculate them are a popular topic of debate during this hot season.

Consumers are enraged as the government is trying to increase the electricity fee to help clear Egat's 150 billion baht debt.

The much debated topic is the formula that the government and Egat use in calculating the Ft, or fuel tariff, in our power bills.

As we have reported previously on these pages, despite a steady decline in the price of liquefied natural gas (LNG), which is used to calculate the cost of electricity, the Energy Regulatory Committee (ERC) under the Ministry of Energy, continues to use an outdated LNG cost of around US\$20 per million BTU instead of the current rate of US\$13 (443 baht).

Egat recently lamented it made a 150 billion baht loss over Sept 2021-Dec 2022 amid Covid and as the war in Ukraine drove up the price of LNG. During this time the government asked state enterprises to keep electricity and tap water fees low, which the agencies achieved via a taxpayer subsidy.

During crises, the government typically uses its state enterprise arms such as Egat and water utilities to help keep prices low for consumers — that is what state enterprises are for.

But a big question arises. Why are consumers now being asked to effectively repay the electricity fee subsidy through higher charges, especially as Egat is now making healthy profits again?

Isn't it the duty of the government, which borrowed heavily to fund economic stimulus programmes, also to find a way to manage Egat's debt?

It cannot go without saying that in 2021, Egat made 25 billion baht profit. Is it logical that the government passes Egat's 150 baht debt burden onto consumers by increasing the Ft tariff on power bills?

The rise in electricity bills is a hot topic on social media.

As the general election on May 14 approaches, parties have pledged to "structure" energy policy and make calculations of the electricity fee fairer for consumers.

Some parties vow to cut down electricity charges down 2 baht a unit, a huge discount from the current rate of 4.7 baht per unit.

The Chartpattanakla Party has promised to remove Ft tariff for four months. The Move Forward Party pledges to restructure energy policy and revise contracts that Egat signed with energy companies, to reduce surplus electricity in the system.

Lest we forget, a past attempt to cancel a contract that Egat signed with a power plant did not bear fruit because the company sued the government back for breach of contractual obligation.

Gulf Energy Development Plc, for example, sued the government and won after the

government cancelled a contract in which it was to sell 5,300 megawatts of energy to Egat.

I am interested in policies on energy policy. Yet I wonder how politicians can restructure energy policy and make it fair.

In my opinion, energy policy is centralised because the details are so technical. Most policy proposals have been formulated by energy technocrats at the Ministry of Energy, without engagement from consumers.

Let us have a look at how energy policy is created.

Energy policies are proposed by the Energy Ministry and decided by the National Energy Policy Council (NEPC) — a committee chaired by the prime minister and related ministers.

However, energy policies such as commercial concessions or even decisions on electricity fees are regulated, decided and monitored by the Energy Regulatory Committee (ERC) and the Energy Ministry.

Most ERC members come from a selection process. In reality, they are officials of the Energy Ministry, if not high-ranking staff from the energy sectors and state enterprises like Egat.

But who gets to be a member of the ERC is decided by the NEPC, which means there is no independent regulatory body monitoring the nation's energy sector. At present, everything is under the umbrella of the Energy Ministry with the EPPA as a think tank.

For over two decades, conservationists and consumer groups and some critical politicians have asked how the kingdom's energy sector operates but without much success.

Conservationists and villagers affected by energy projects lament the fact the Ft tariff has been used by the government to pass on financial burdens from buying too much electricity from private power plants.

So instead of resorting to populist promises, politicians could change the recruitment process of the ERC by adopting a more open process through parliament like the selection of the National Broadcasting and Telecommunication Commission (NBTC).

The NBTC, which oversees telecom concessions, is far from perfect, yet its more open selection process and status as a national committee outside the domination of the ministry has encouraged more transparency and allows society and consumers to monitor what is happening.

By comparison, the ERC and NEPC are quintessentially bureaucratic. Energy technocrats often manipulate debates with technical jargon invented by their own clans.

With these technocrats in the driving seat, I bet that in the next 10 years, we will keep

criticising, complaining about the Ft charge and over-forecasts of power demand, just like we have done for the past 20 years.

The dream of making energy policy fair will come true only when consumers are included in the decision-making process.

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**Anchalee Kongrut is Bangkok Post's editorial pages editor.**