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KUALA LUMPUR (Sept 22): The High Court here has ordered Tenaga Nasional Bhd (TNB)(KL:TENAGA) to pay RM10.52 million in special damages to Penang Bridge concessionaire Projek Lebuhraya Usahasama Bhd (PLUS) over a major fire incident in a cable tunnel beneath the bridge in February 2021.

In a judgement delivered on Sept 16, 2026, High Court judge Ahmad Shahrir Mohd Salleh ruled that TNB was liable in both common law negligence and breach of statutory duty under Section 33A of the Electricity Supply Act 1990 (ESA 1990), for failing to detect and repair pre-existing mechanical damage on its 132kV high-voltage cables.

The court awarded pre-judgement interest on the RM10.52 million sum at 5% per annum calculated from the date of the fire on Feb 22, 2021, until full satisfaction of the judgement.

Additionally, TNB was ordered to pay RM400,000 in legal costs to PLUS, subject to allocatur.

The suit arose from the fire detected at approximately 4:20pm on Feb 22, 2021, near KM3.3 (Pier No. 52E) of the Penang Bridge, where TNB maintained three circuits of 132kV cables running through a tunnel beneath the bridge deck. A second re-kindled fire occurred the following morning.

In Ahmad Shahrir's judgement sighted by *The Edge*, he said the fire had caused two main forms of structural damage, one was damage to the structural beams of the Penang Bridge (near KM3.3 / Pier No. 52E), necessitating immediate and exten-

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sive remedial repair works, and the other was damage caused to electric cables and wooden cable trays holding the cables.

Breakdown of damages

The total special damages of RM10.52 million awarded to PLUS comprised four distinct heads:

1. RM9.69 million for structural repair works carried out by Edgenta Infrastructure Services Sdn Bhd.
2. RM660,520.80 for structural assessment, investigation, and design of remedial works by JK Bersatu Sdn Bhd.
3. RM114,731.22 for cause investigation fees paid to Forensic Services (M) Sdn Bhd and certified fire investigator and expert, Anand Ghnavello.
4. RM50,000.00 in legal costs incurred during pre-action discovery proceedings against TNB and the Fire and Rescue Department (Bomba).

Court rejected TNB's rubbish burning theory

At trial, the central dispute focused on competing expert theories regarding the cause of the blaze.

PLUS relied on its expert witness, Anand Ghnavello — a fire and explosion investigator certified by the National Association of Fire Investigators, USA — who testified that the fire was likely initiated by

electrical arcing in the blue phase cable of Circuit 2 caused by pre-existing mechanical damage from cut marks extending to the cable's water protection layer. Heat from the internal arcing rapidly ignited the surrounding cable sheath and wooden cable trays.

TNB engaged Dr Tan Yoke Lin, an electrical engineer, as its expert witness. Tan testified his competing view that a discarded cigarette fell through a broken scupper drain downpipe, igniting accumulated rubbish on the tunnel floor, which then burned the cables from the outside in.

Ahmad Shahrir rejected TNB's defence, noting that electrical arcing originates internally at the live conductor and spreads outward, rather than travelling inward from an earthed outer sheath.

The court found TNB's theory highly speculative, as it required a series of improbable events — including at least one lit cigarette surviving a fall through a narrow drain downpipe into an open-sea environment and igniting accumulated rubbish on a tunnel floor that TNB's own records showed was regularly inspected and cleaned.

Ahmad Shahrir emphasized that undertakers managing dangerous high-voltage electricity owe a high standard of care matching the hazard.

The court ruled that Section 33 of the Electricity Supply Act 1990 which governs protocols following major electrical incidents imposes a civilly enforceable statutory duty on supply licensees to adhere to safety standards and prudent utility practices.

Ahmad Shahrir found that TNB had failed to produce its Grid Asset Maintenance Guidelines, historical insulation testing records, or cleaning photographs, and failed to call its maintenance subcontractors to testify.

PLUS was represented by Raja Eileen Soraya Raja Aman, Joshua Chong Wan Ken, Melanie Lim Sheng Ning, and Nicole Koh Sui Fen of Messrs Raja, Darryl & Loh.

TNB was represented by Barvina Punusamy and Nur Sabrina Ahmad Kamal of Messrs Jayadeep Hari & Jamil.



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The Kuala Lumpur Courts Complex, which situates the KL High Court.



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