

SA should not shy away from costs of fixing power crisis - electricity minister

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12 Apr 2023

South Africa should not shy away from spending to fix the country's power crisis, electricity minister Kgosientsho Ramokgopa told Reuters, ahead of a cabinet decision later this month on his proposals to end the crisis.



Minister of electricity Kgosientsho Ramokgopa speaks during an interview in his office at the Union Buildings in Pretoria. Source: Reuters/Alet Pretorius

Ramokgopa was speaking in an interview less than two months after the National Treasury granted Eskom R254bn of debt relief over the next three years.

He said he thought focusing on improving the performance of Eskom's ailing coal plants was the best opportunity to lower the intensity of power outages.

But he said other interventions were needed, including investing in the capacity of the national grid and maintaining large outlays on diesel for Eskom's emergency open-cycle gas turbines.

"Continued high levels of load shedding... penalise the South African economy and it causes untold injury to the poor, and our ability to attract investment," he said.



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A necessary trade-off

If South African borrowing costs had to rise to fund diesel purchases then that was a necessary trade-off given the impact outages were having on unemployment and growth prospects, he said.

"I am presenting to Cabinet and they will make that determination (on how to address the power crisis) at the end of the month," he added.

Ramokgopa said grid constraints meant some renewable energy projects that had already been built were being throttled and new projects were being jeopardised.

He said another set of interventions Cabinet would consider included Eskom investing more in the coal mines it buys from to ensure better-quality supplies and allowing Eskom to buy directly from original equipment manufacturers rather than from intermediaries.

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