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Author: Mayibongwe Maqhina

Eskom chief's future in the board's hands

Ramaphosa tells Parliament that plans are in place to end load shedding as a matter of urgency

MAYIBONGWE MAQHINA

THE Eskom board will soon assess the performances of the power utility's executives, including chief executive André de Ruyter, who is facing mounting calls that he be sacked over the worst load shedding in the country's history.

Responding to oral questions in the National Assembly yesterday, President Cyril Ramaphosa said De Ruyter was appointed on a five-year contract in January 2020 and reports to the newly-appointed board.

He asked that the board be given space to assess what needs to be done to improve the efficiency of existing plants and the effectiveness of management and operators at all levels.

"This is a process, I believe, they have started on or will be embarking on soon," he said.

When EFF leader Julius Malema interjected, he insisted that the assessment of the performance of the executive leadership should be done by a



PRESIDENT Cyril Ramaphosa | African News Agency (ANA)

properly constituted body.

"You may not be pleased with the process. That is the most fair process to anybody," said Ramaphosa before indicating that no entity other than Eskom has had close to 20 CEOs in the 28 years of democracy.

He said the board would embark on the performance assessment so that it could brief the shareholder on its own assessment and present proposals.

"Let us give them the support they need so that they can do their work.

Where they fail, clearly action does need to be taken," Ramaphosa said.

He blamed recent load shedding on insufficient investment at Eskom in new generation capacity that was needed two decades ago.

Ramaphosa said the structural challenges had resulted in the national capacity shortage of between 4000 and 6000 megawatts.

"This situation was made worse by delays in building Kusile and Medupi (power stations), the faulty design that has accompanied that whole build, state capture, corruption and loss of experienced staff," he said.

Ramaphosa again said real maintenance at Eskom had been halted for quite a number of years.

"Power stations were run very hard to maximum capacity with poor reliability on maintenance and neglect of mid-life refurbishment."

A range of initiatives were currently under way as a matter of urgency to stop load shedding.

"This work, which is managed by the energy crisis committee in the Presidency, includes ensuring that units at Kusile are brought into commercial operation and expediting what needs to be expedited at Medupi, implementation of reliable maintenance through focused and quality maintenance but also recruitment of experienced staff."

Eskom chief operating officer Jan



SUPPORTERS of Pakistan's former prime minister, Imran Khan, block a road following a shooting incident on his long march in Wazirabad, during a protest in Karachi, Pakistan. He was shot yesterday in what his spokesperson said was an assassination attempt on the former leader. | IMRAN ALI Reuters

Oberholzer had previously confirmed that it would take no less than 18 months for the country's energy situation to stabilise.

Ramaphosa said non-payment for services was unacceptable and they had taken a number of steps to ensure that payment of those debts was recovered.

The Department of Public Works pays service charges and property rates on behalf of client departments.

In September, the department paid R575 million for property rates and municipal services and processed invoices valued at R51m to Eskom.

"Where there are disputes, as often there are, the department pays what is not disputed and engages on amounts and accounts that are disputed," he said.

DA leader John Steenhuisen asked whether Ramaphosa had instructed ministers to pay back the money for the

unlimited free electricity and water they received when the Ministerial Handbook was amended in April and withdrawn last month.

Ramaphosa said: "It was also under way when we looked at various processes or costs that have to be carried, first by the state and also by individual ministers."

"I am not able to say now whether it has reached conclusions," he said.