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**Author:** Nicola Daniels

NATION

## Taxpayers left in dark while paying R2m to keep ministers' lights on

NICOLA DANIELS

nicola.daniels@inl.co.za

WHILE South Africans were plunged into darkness during Eskom's load shedding, ministers and their deputies' state-owned houses had generators to keep their lights on, costing the already squeezed taxpayer R2 million.

This emerged in Public Works and Infrastructure Minister Patricia de Lille's reply to a parliamentary question by IFP MP Themba Msimang who wanted to know the updated figure of the total amount of taxpayer money that was spent on generators for private use by ministers.

The Department of Public Works and Infrastructure spent R1.3 million before April 1 and a further R680 000 was spent from April to June this year.

De Lille's written response comes on the heels of an announcement by President Cyril Ramaphosa telling Parliament last week that the process of reconciliation of all the amounts was under way, on the costs that have to be carried by the state and also by individual ministers.

"I am not able to say now whether it has reached a conclusion," Ramaphosa

said, when asked during a question session whether he had instructed Cabinet ministers to pay back the money.

In October, Ramaphosa withdrew the amended Ministerial Handbook, which saw members of the Cabinet receive free electricity and water at ministerial houses.

This followed public outrage after it emerged that the amendments were done away from public scrutiny.

Ramaphosa said he withdrew the Ministerial Handbook with a view to having the matter properly processed.

"We have a situation now where the salaries of public representatives is determined by an independent body.

"It occurred to me that an issue such as this one also would need, once it is properly processed, to be properly examined by an independent body because all of us who tend to determine these benefits are essentially insiders.

Therefore, you need an independent body that could examine all these (issues)."

When the Ministerial Handbook was withdrawn last month, Ramaphosa's spokesperson Vincent Magwenya said the president acknowledged and appreciated public sentiments on the matter.