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City substations in dire state

Costs to fix flood-damaged infrastructure could reach R550m

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AS THE eThekweni Municipality battles with frequent power outages, it has emerged that six to eight major substations, which were among those damaged in the floods in April last year, are in urgent need of repair and could cost the City almost R400 million to fix.

In addition, there are also medium voltage substations that need repair work at an estimated cost of R150m.

Head of Electricity Maxwell Mthembu said in an interview with *The Mercury* this week that the City had 120 major high voltage substations that were affected by the floods and six to eight of these were in urgent need of repairs.

The critical state of the City's electricity infrastructure was laid bare in a joint statement it released with Eskom in July last year where it was announced that the municipality would only implement load shedding from stage 4 upwards.

eThekweni had been exempt from load shedding from the time of the floods until August 1 last year.

Mthembu spoke on the challenges that are faced by the unit after the City worked to restore power in Prospecton. Part of the area had been without power for an extended period following a fire at a substation at Toyota and damage at another.

Mthembu said what happened at the substation at Toyota and the one that failed after that in the same area was indicative of the extent of the damage to the infrastructure and how unpredictable it had become.

"We have no technical explanation as to why that substation caught fire," he said.

"These substations were submerged in water. Ideally, if the infrastructure is compromised in such a manner it should be changed, but at the moment we do not have the funds to deal with all the substations, so we are dealing with the ones that are critical.

"The fire and the damage at these two substations (which are among the most critical) is something that we did not anticipate, which goes to the fact that we are expecting anything to happen to them because of how severely they were compromised. There is no substation that was built to withstand that kind of damage that these have suffered," he said.

Mthembu said it was important to limit the impact of outages, especially

where the City supplies businesses.

"The reality is that 30% of the supply goes to businesses and 70% of the City's revenue is generated by these businesses, so failing to supply these areas with power could be catastrophic for the City's finances.

"Right now we are focused on refurbishment of the critical infrastructure, that is what we are attending to. There are between six and eight substations that we need to attend to urgently and it will cost the municipality close to R400m to deal with these substations.

"We will also need another R150m to deal with medium voltage stations," he said.

"All our stations were affected, but more so those whose switch gears are inside, because the water was just rising inside the substation with no area to escape to. Therefore the switchgear was submerged in water," he said.

Mthembu called on communities that were affected by the frequent power outages to be patient.

"We understand the communities' frustration over power outages that lead to food being spoiled, we call for their patience to resolve the matter.

"City officials like the CFO's office are giving the electricity department a lot of support."

DA councillor Thabani Mthethwa said they had warned the City of the urgent need to attend to the stations.

He said instead, the municipality had chosen to approve spending of R20m on the Expanded Public Works Programme.

"Our view is that we were told immediately after the floods that the municipality needed to reprioritise the budget to attend to infrastructure repairs.

"The fact that they chose to spend hundreds of millions of rand on programmes which are supposed to be funded by the national government, instead of allocating those funds to fix critical infrastructure, is evidence enough that the ANC leadership is responsible for the crisis we face in eThekweni," he said.

IFP councillor Mdu Nkosi said he hoped that the national government made good on its promise to assist the municipality with a billion rand that it had promised after the floods.

"We hope that now that the national Budget has been delivered, something will happen. It cannot be that there continues to be complaints of water and electricity outages in eThekweni," he said.



ZULU King Misuzulu kaZwelithini and KwaZulu-Natal Premier Nomusa Dube-Ncube at the official event to mark the opening of the provincial legislature in Pietermaritzburg yesterday. | DOCTOR NGCOBO African News Agency (ANA)

Zulu king calls for action against crime

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ZULU King Misuzulu kaZwelithini has called for an urgent provincial meeting to address the killing of *amakhozi* and other traditional leaders in the province.

Delivering the inaugural address to mark the opening of the KwaZulu-Natal legislature in Pietermaritzburg yesterday, the monarch said the meeting should include the government, police and traditional leadership.

"I refer with great consternation to the wanton killing of *amakhozi*, *izibuhani* and councillors. As *isilo* (king) I am appealing to everyone to honour *ubuntu* and kill no one. Killing is inhuman. Killing is barbaric," the king told the audience, which included Premier Nomusa Dube-Ncube and Judge President Thoba Poyo-Dlwati.

According to the king, the meeting should serve as a platform to ensure that killings came to an end.

"The meeting (involving the government, police and traditional leadership) should be about how these structures work together in finding solutions as opposed to discussing the killings, because there is sufficient evidence that

the killings are taking place in all parts of the province," said the king.

The king also noted that community members in areas under traditional leadership were also murdered, and this needed to be part of the discussions.

"These community members should offer solutions and their inputs should be taken into consideration because in this country no one should live in fear."

The monarch expressed concern about killings involving the use of guns, saying the availability of illegal guns was the reason that people were killed in rural and urban areas, including schools, making KZN one of the most dangerous provinces in the country.

"As your king, I sadly acknowledge that I am in a province and a country beset by this scourge. In a country where most citizens live in fear. Where day by day, at home, at work and in the streets they avoid those who are supposed to be their partners and protectors."

According to the monarch, gender-based violence and femicide were huge barriers preventing equality and dignity for women and girls.

IFP president Velenkosini Hlabisa said the king's message was fitting and it was necessary for the government to

take firm action and put an end to the crime ravaging the province.

"The problem of illegal guns in circulation is the reason that we have so many killings in the province, especially of traditional leadership. That is why we welcome the call of a meeting that will involve government, traditional leadership and the police," said Hlabisa.

Provincial DA leader Francois Rodgers described the king's speech as encouraging and giving a fair account of the challenges facing the province.

He pledged the party's support on the proposal to enhance tourism.

"We were very encouraged by his majesty's call to use tourism in order to create opportunities. We will support any endeavour by the king to promote tourism," the DA leader said.

KZN police commissioner Lieutenant-General Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi said they would be part of the meeting called by the king.

"We welcome the king's call for such a meeting with open arms and we will be part of it," said the police commissioner.

Today the premier will deliver the State of the Province Address, where she is expected to outline the provincial government's priorities for the year.