

# Eskom to reduce power cuts but long-term outlook bleak

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Eskom said it would shorten power cuts from Tuesday morning, 17 January, as 14 generators come back on tap this week, but electricity shortages look set to continue at least into 2024.



Source: Reuters/Siphiwe Sibeko

President Cyril Ramaphosa cancelled plans to attend the World Economic Forum in Davos this week over the crisis, prompting the rand to fall on Monday. On Sunday, his spokesperson said he was due to meet leaders of political parties, an energy crisis committee and Eskom's board of directors.

But even while Eskom said that from Tuesday power cuts would be reduced slightly, two opposition parties that attended a meeting with Eskom officials over the weekend said they had been told outages would persist well into next year.



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## Major source of frustration

The company implemented power cuts on more than 200 days last year, the most in a calendar year. The power shortages are a major source of frustration for voters ahead of 2024 elections that could see the governing African National Congress lose its majority in parliament for the first time.

Eskom's outgoing CEO Andre de Ruyter made a submission to political party leaders during an emergency meeting called by Ramaphosa on Sunday night.

"They told us what the plan is to procure new energy [generating capacity] and money, and the core of the message is that we will be saddled with power cuts even after 2024," Pieter Groenewald, leader of the Freedom Front Plus, told Reuters, echoing a statement by the EFF on the meeting.

Creaking coal-fire power stations, underinvestment in new generating capacity, corruption in coal supply contracts and foot-dragging on policies that would enable private providers to plug the shortfall with renewable energy have all conspired to leave South Africa woefully short of its power needs.



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## High degree of uncertainty

Eskom said from Tuesday the pattern would be Stage 4 rotational outages from 5am until 4pm, followed by Stage 5 from 4pm until 5am the following morning.

The utility said it had procured an additional 50 million litres of diesel, which would be used to manage pumped storage dam levels and limit power cuts.

However, Eskom added there was a high degree of uncertainty and these changes would only be possible if the units returned to service as planned.

In recent days, Eskom has been implementing Stage 6 outages, reducing supplies on the national grid by up to 6,000MW. Under Stages 4 and 5, the reductions are 4,000MW and 5,000MW, respectively.

Almost 22,000MW of its 46,000MW nominal capacity is offline for planned repairs or because of breakdowns.

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