

Progress will be made in Eskom build programme

PRETORIA: Government will intervene to ensure progress in the build programme of South Africa's power stations, Public Enterprises Minister Malusi Gigaba said on Monday, 22 April 2013.



The construction of the coal-fired Medupi power plant in Limpopo has seen several strikes by workers at the plant. The plant is expected to generate first power in December this year, after having already been pushed back from a 2012 target.

Earlier this year, power parastatal Eskom temporarily closed the station following protest action.

Eskom's build programme, which began in 2005, is expected to be completed in 2019.

The R340 billion expansion programme represents immense job creation potential that would be unearthed in the building of new plants.

Medupi will have a total at 4 788 MW installed capacity and will ease the pressure on the country's power grid. The last unit of the plant is scheduled for commissioning by 2015, while the planned operational life of the station is 50 years.

There has also been strike action at Eskom's Kusile coal-fired power station (which is supposed to start up next year) in Mpumalanga.

"We are treating the whole build programme as a priority. All eyes are on ensuring first delivery and so whether there might be a strike at Kusile, we have taken steps to heighten our management of this project.

"We are in continuous discussions with a number of players as we had announced on 11 April. We asked the board to establish a subcommittee; we had also taken steps to ensure that executives visit Medupi at least once a week to engage," Gigaba said at an Eskom media briefing.

The minister had visited the Medupi plant on 11 April.

"I don't think any of the stakeholders will be allowed to delay, hold-back or even worse, reverse progress which has been

made. We will make the progress we need to make, we will intervene as we have to," Gigaba said.

The minister appealed to the public to play their part in ensuring that the lights are kept on.

The improvement of Eskom's maintenance practices was a step in the right direction and would go a long way in reducing the maintenance backlog, which at the end of March 2013, was at 23 units from 36 units in January 2012.

At Monday's briefing, the power utility said that this winter will be different in that generation maintenance will be done and not deferred. Usually maintenance is reduced to a minimum over the winter months. The utility said planned maintenance could not be deferred as power stations were ageing and sustained high levels of planned maintenance are needed to ensure reliable performance.

"The undertaking of this planned maintenance will thus result in an even more delicate power system," said Gigaba.

Eskom Chief Executive Officer Brian Dames said the utility had "really focused" on labour issues.

"We have dealt substantially with issues. We have received strong support from labour," said Dames.

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