

Total blackout not a credible risk, says Eskom CEO

Eskom chief executive André de Ruyter has dismissed any suggestion that the South African power grid is in immediate danger of a total system blackout. This as the power utility was forced to implement Stage 4 load shedding on Tuesday following significant breakdowns at six generation units at power stations across the country.



Source: Sumaya Hisham/Reuters

De Ruyter told journalists during an update on problems besetting the power utility that any talk of a total system failure is “unrealistic” and causes unnecessary panic.

“We have this tool [load shedding] at our disposal. We have significant buffer capacity in the load shedding system before we approximate even close to a total system blackout. We are currently sitting at Stage 4, the load shedding system provides for a further reduction in load as low Stage 8. We still do have headroom in the system to allow us to avoid a total blackout.

“So I would caution against speculation in this regard. I would caution against fear-mongering and stoking of speculation and fear in this regard. We do have plans in place. We have the capability of recovering, and we do not anticipate this as a credible risk at this point in time,” he said on Wednesday, 20 April.



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Capability to restart the grid

De Ruyter emphasised that in the “highly unlikely” event that a total blackout does occur, the power supplier has the capability to restart the grid.

“Once the total electricity supply is lost, restoring the supply is a gradual task that requires...black start capability. Our pump storage facility plays a very important role in that. We also have black start capability at our Kendal power station as well as at Tutuka power station. These facilities are regularly inspected [and] maintained as part of our compliance to the national grid,” he said.

The chief executive acknowledged that Eskom is in need of additional generation capacity and said the power utility is doing all it can in this regard.

“We are also taking other steps. In particular, the making available of additional grid access to investors who wish to make use of the less than 100MW dispensation for embedded or own generation.

“We are aware that our grid access unit needs to do more to expedite applications. We are streamlining those applications,” De Ruyter said.

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