

Strike action leaves SA in the dark

 By Nicci Botha

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Eskom left large chunks of the country in the dark on Thursday night when it implemented stage one load shedding, blaming the black out on sabotage by striking workers.

“ [#PowerUpdate](#): Due to severe power constraints, Eskom will implement stage 1 of loadshedding from now (17:50) until 20:00. Acts of intimidation and sabotage have resulted in Eskom being unable to ensure uninterrupted power supply. [@SABCNewsOnline](#) [@afroworldview](#) [@JacaNews](#) [@IOL](#) — Khulu Phasiwe (@KhuluPhasiwe) [June 14, 2018](#) ”

The financially troubled power utility is in a labour dispute with unions after it announced a 0% wage increment for employees.

The National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and the National Union of Metalworkers (Numsa), demanding a 15% wage increase, rejected the offer and staged pickets on Thursday. They were joined by Solidarity, which is asking for a 9.5% increase. Eskom reported that the strike action had led to several incidents of road blockades, attacks on staff, and wilful damage of electricity infrastructure.



Eskom has obtained an urgent interdict from the Labour Court against the three unions on the basis that the majority of workers at the state-owned enterprise (SOE) fall under the category of essential services and are barred from striking.

Meeting with Gordhan

Meanwhile, Public Enterprises Minister, Pravin Gordhan, departmental officials and Eskom board members met with the leadership of Cosatu at their invitation on Wednesday.

“The minister wanted to understand the concerns from organised labour about the wage dispute with Eskom and related matters. Amongst the concerns expressed by Cosatu were the manner in which wage negotiations have been conducted, the zero percent wage offer, and allegations that the independent power producers programme is crowding out jobs in the mining sector,” the department said.

At the meeting, Gordhan explained the current challenging environment, including the contraction in economic growth in quarter one of 2018 and lower growth projections for 2018, and that government does not have the money to continuously bail-out SOEs.

“The minister agreed that it was improper to raise the issue of down-sizing Eskom at the same time as the current wage negotiations. He undertook to discuss the resumption of negotiations with the Eskom board and to ensure that a constructive and respectful atmosphere for negotiations is created,” said the department.

Gordhan said it is the responsibility of the board to determine what kind of wage increase Eskom can offer its employees, within the framework of the board’s fiduciary responsibilities.

“The minister is in no position to instruct the board on this issue,” said DPE, adding that the he has offered to convene an information-sharing session between Eskom and Cosatu so that the company’s financial position is understood and taken into account by all parties.

ABOUT NICCI BOTHA

Nicci Botha has been wordsmithing for more than 20 years, covering just about every subject under the sun and then some. She's strung together words on sustainable development, maritime matters, mining, marketing, medical, lifestyle... and that elixir of life - chocolate. Nicci has worked for local and international media houses including Primedia, Caxton, Lloyd's and Reuters. Her new passion is digital media.

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