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40 days without load-shedding, but rolling outages not over yet

By [Aarti Bhana](#)



South Africa has marked 40 days without load-shedding, with no imminent power cuts on the horizon, but despite this trend, rolling blackouts are unlikely to vanish by year's end. (Leon Sadiki/Bloomberg via Getty Images)

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According to Business for South Africa (B4SA) — the business and government partnership set up to deal with energy, freight, crime and corruption issues — load-shedding was [61% lower](#) from December 2023 to February 2024 compared with the same period in 2022-23.

Energy Council chief executive James Mackay said that through the partnership, businesses had offered advisory support and resources to implement the government's Energy Action Plan (EAP).

“Thanks to this joint effort, more than 3.5 gigawatts of grid capacity has been unlocked; 7.6GW of Requests for Proposals have been released to procure 5GW of renewable energy, 2GW of gas-to-power, and 0.6 GW battery storage,” he said.

He added that in March this year, the National Energy Crisis Committee worked on improving five power stations, and 17 businesses had assigned resources to the partnership to support the plant performance turnaround at Eskom. This included business giving more than 4000 hours working on a pro bono basis to support the project.

“This partnership has already led to successes. At Kusile, business provided expertise and advice which led to 1600 megawatts being added back to the grid as units were recovered two months ahead of schedule. At Matla, two investigative teams were provided by business through the partnership — including mechanical and maintenance engineers,” Mackay said.

As South Africa marks six weeks without load-shedding, Electricity Minister Kgosientsho Ramokgopa said at a press briefing on [Monday](#) that the energy outlook is more positive than initial forecasts: in May last year, Eskom forecast it would lose 1500MW in May 2024 in the best case scenario, but it had only lost 1400MW this year.

“Eskom by its own admission accepts that the kind of improvement that we have seen is so enduring that we can say to the country that we have clawed back 1000MW compared to the same period the previous calendar year.”

Furthermore, the amount of electricity lost in the 12-month period from May 2023 to May 2024 decreased by 7000MW from 18 196MW in May 2023 to 11 036MW this year.

“We have been able to recover as a result of the concerted efforts of these distinguished men and women, starting with the board and the lowest member of the Eskom team, we were able to bring back 7000MW. All indications suggest that we will continue to improve on this number,” he said.

Energy expert Chris Yelland also [noted](#) that Eskom’s unplanned breakdowns for the first 13 weeks of this year are consistently lower than for the first 13 weeks of last year. But he said this could be attributed to factors outside the partnership.

The reduction in load-shedding is a result of reduced dependency on Eskom’s grid as more people resort to solar rooftops, photovoltaic and battery storage in the residential, commercial and agricultural sector, Yelland said. Another factor is the general price of electricity in South Africa. Furthermore, consumers are using electricity more carefully and efficiently.

“Demand for electricity might not be going down. But demand for Eskom electricity is going down. If you look at Eskom, sales are going down. The amount of units of energy that they sell in the economy is going down. What is really happening is it’s being replaced by other sources of energy,” he said.

Ramokgopa said households and industries are rolling out solar power, a move triggered by the unreliability of the electricity grid, as well as by the government’s incentives.

Yelland said the B4SA partnership is welcomed because it encourages the government to open the door to the private sector to become part of the solution.

“There’s a high appetite for private sector participation in the electricity sector, significant investment is going to have to come from the private sector because the government is financially constrained and so is Eskom.”

The B4SA partnership involves about 130 chief executives of companies with a combined market capitalisation of more than R11 trillion. The support from the private sector has resulted in about R170 million in funding and the mobilisation of more than 350 private sector experts to support their partners in the public sector.

Despite this temporary return to normalcy, Yelland said that the dark days of load-shedding are far from [over](#), a comment similar to that of Ramokgopa who reiterated that South Africa is not out of the woods yet. Eskom’s group chief executive, Dan Marokane, said in April that South Africans can expect stage two load-shedding in the [winter](#) months when demand increases.

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