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Massive power cuts loom

Herald Reporter

LARGE swathes of the country will receive erratic electricity supply for the next two weeks starting today as load-shedding escalates owing to the Zimbabwe Power Company's annual maintenance of the Kariba Power Station.

The maintenance — to be conducted in two phases — will see the country's electricity generation capacity slumping by 250 megawatts, resulting in increased load-shedding outside the published schedules.

During the maintenance period, Kariba's power generation capacity will come down from 750 to 500 megawatts, said Zesa Holdings spokesperson Mr Fullard Gwasira yesterday.

"Zesa Holdings wishes to advise its valued customers countrywide that there will be an increase in load-shedding due to reduced power generation at Kariba Power Station from Friday October 23 until the end of the second week of November.

"We value our industry, commerce, agriculture and domestic consumers.

"Since industry and commerce want to achieve 60 percent capacity (by year-end), we are going to make sure that it receives power during the day, while domestic consumers will be catered for during the night," he said.

Mr Gwasira said important national installations would not be switched off during the maintenance period.

"Some people are going to see it conspicuous that border posts, hospitals, security installations, airports, water pumping stations in various towns and cities and central business districts will not be affected.

"We encourage the people to pay their bills so as to finance such annual maintenance exercises because it guarantees the country uninterrupted power supply the whole year," he said.

According to Mr Gwasira, the initial phase of the repairs at Kariba will result in the loss of 125 megawatts from the national grid and on October 31 another 125 megawatts will be lost. Power restoration is also expected to come in two phases; meaning 125MW will be back online in the first week of November with the situation reverting to current standards the following week.

"Arrangements have been put in place to alleviate the impact and they include increased power generation capacity at Hwange Power Station and a possible increase in power imports.

"Hwange is producing about 350 megawatts right now, but its capacity can be boosted to over 480 megawatts.

"Although I sympathise with some soccer fans, it is imperative to note that the exercise is now due and we have to do it."

Mr Gwasira urged consumers to settle their bills to enable Zesa Holdings to operate efficiently as well as finance the "expensive" routine maintenance exercise as well as replace vandalised property.

"I would like to urge our valued customers owing Zesa to settle their bills as Zesa has to fork out money to carry out maintenance exercises and replace vandalised property as well as paying regional suppliers for power imports.

"People should understand that we also pay for the water that we use for power generation."
Mr Gwasira said the power utility was owed about US\$300 million by its customers.
The company needs the money to buy transformers, oils, cables, utility vehicles and to repair leaks.

Zesa imports at least 30 percent of the power used in the country from its neighbours to augment what it generates at Kariba and Hwange Thermal Power Station.

Ironically, though, the nation loses over 30 percent of power through wastage.

The lost electricity is enough to fully power four small towns.