

Load shedding continues

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Uzumba MP Cde Simba Mudarikwa

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Zimbabwe should brace for continued load shedding in the next four years as Zesa Holdings grapples with an array of challenges among them vandalism that destroys property worth US\$800 000 per month.

Zesa chief executive officer Engineer Josh Chifamba said the challenges that include a huge debt overhang, low installed capacity and general dip in the availability of power in the region will see the power utility load-shedding to share the limited resources.

Eng Chifamba was giving oral evidence before a Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Mines and Energy.

The committee, which was chaired by Uzumba MP Cde Simba Mudarikwa (Zanu-PF), wanted to know the challenges faced by Zesa. Eng Chifamba said the recent tariff increase, coupled with new projects currently being implemented both at Hwange and Kariba Power Station should be a source of hope for improved electricity supply in the next three years.

"When are we going to see improvement? Obviously what Honourable Members and the rest of the country are expecting to hear is the time when we will not be load shedding.

"That time is not very close, the time we need to commission new projects is about three years."

He said two more projects are being implemented at Hwange and Kariba.

"At Hwange, we will be putting two extra machines to give us 600 Megawatts and Kariba 300 MW, that's 900 MW, we expect to finish Kariba in 2015 and Hwange 2016," he said.

Eng Chifamba said the completion of these projects would not see loading shedding easing.

"When that happens, it will alleviate our situation but we will still not be out of the woods."

He said Botswana was currently working on a new project and Zesa hopes to tap into it when it is completed.

The deal was, however, subject to the two countries agreeing terms.

Eng Chifamba said consumer debt had been reduced from US\$450 million to US\$427 million owing to payment arrangement Zesa has entered with customers.

The delay in approving a cost reflective structure has seen Zesa failing to repair and maintain equipment while affecting operations.

The Zesa boss implored legislators to come up with a legal instrument that would punish consumers who continue to use old bulbs instead of energy savers once new bulbs have been introduced.

On tariffs, Eng Chifamba said the approved structures though coming late had gone a long way in stabilising operations.

"The tariffs are meant to address these challenges. It will simply allow us to operate our business normally," he said.

It was critical, said Eng Chifamba, for stakeholders to realise that electricity was not cheap.

He said the price of coal has also threatened the viability of their business.

Eng Chifamba called for a good operating environment conducive to draw investors.

"We need all forms of stability in the country," he said.

On independent power producers, Eng Chifamba dismissed indications that they were blocking them.

He said Zesa wished to see more stakeholders coming in to assist them deliver electricity.