

Transparency, responsibility and accountability will keep Ramokgopa in check

Speech by Ghaleb Cachalia MP, DA Shadow Minister of Public Enterprises

As my colleague, Kevin Mileham has argued, we are desperately in need of implementing sections 55, 56 and 92 to exercise oversight over the minister of electricity and implementation of his plans.

The minister's avowed focus is only load-shedding and he seems to have succeeded for one solitary day only when the EFF tried to effect a national shutdown that was more like a national joke.

But I divert...

His aim is to get the units at Eskom online. Never mind unbundling of the entity into transmission, generation and distribution. His priority for now is to focus on fixing load-shedding. And he thinks that's going to come from simply visiting 14 power stations and that the challenges at Kusile for example, that mothership of corruption, are simply 'technical problems, that have nothing to do with so-called corruption'.. his words.

Never mind that extending the life of the coal fleet would contradict the plans laid out for renewable energy and energy security – which include the 2019 Integrated Resource Plan and the Energy Action Plan announced in 2022 – and which includes approvals for 30 gigawatts of renewable energy and where no plans are noted to extend the life of coal plants.

Methinks, the left hand doesn't know what its own left shoulder and elbow are doing

It's all a bit of a dog's breakfast if you ask me with Minister Gwede Mantashe initially saying the new electricity minister would only be a "project Manager" and then the confusion about who Mr Ramokgopa actually reports to. Does his work fall under the public enterprises department and minister Pravin Gordhan where Eskom lies, or does it fall under the energy department of minister Mantashe?

Add to this the debacle of the president placing us in an electricity state of disaster in February and then withdrawing it no sooner than a rotisserie chicken could turn, while Mr Ramokgopa assured us that this withdrawal would not undermine the "agility, pace and responsiveness" of procurement.

I'm not sure what happened to the President's belief that the state of disaster was the way to remove bureaucratic obstacles standing in Eskom's way, as the country grappled with load-shedding.

Meanwhile the elephant in the room remains – with cash from operations being insufficient to meet debt servicing and capital investment requirements which translates into an inability to effect required repairs and maintenance and to fund unsustainably high finance costs and primary energy expenses in the usage of Open Cycle Gas Turbines which burns diesel at the rate of knots.

Where, Oh minister of the three lamps is the dosh going to come from?

Who is going to monitor what you're doing with your oil rag?

Who is going to make your wishes come true? And how?

Who is going to hold this new kid on the block accountable while the hoary old chestnuts of corruption, mismanagement, cadre deployment and policy incoherence, need – now more than ever – a beady eye?

Who is going to honour the dictates of our constitution about oversight of cabinet ministers?

Especially when the genie, the oil rag and the wishes currently sit on a carpet in the presidency which is devoid of the very oversight mechanisms our constitution requires.

Surely it's time for an ad hoc committee to ensure transparency, responsibility and accountability.... lest we continue to leave the door open to finding successive letters of the alphabet to fill the spaces between the (a) of the arms deal and the (z) of Zondo Commission? And don't forget, this minister of electricity has form here – remember the tender scandal for smart meters in which he was involved during his time as mayor of the Tshwane municipality, costing taxpayers billions of rands.

Now perhaps you're beginning to understand why we're insisting on the constitutional dictates that govern oversight and accountability in our constitution.