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Government already tackling Gibraltar's creaking electrical infrastructure

The Government wish to point out that the main reason for the recent spate of power cuts is the creaking electricity infrastructure, distribution network and equipment which is currently in place and which should have been replaced a decade ago.

The power outages are therefore unrelated to Gibraltar's generating capacity which is now well served with the addition of the new turbines in the North Mole.

The positive side is that with the turbines there is now spare generating capacity to restore power supply quickly hence why in the main power cuts have only lasted approximately a few minutes, with the notable exception of yesterday.

The main reason why the Government have brought in the turbines was to be able to start servicing our engines again at the three power stations as these have not been properly serviced for many years, due to a shortfall in generating capacity consequent of the OESCO plant failures.

This lack of servicing in the past is directly attributable to some of these engine failures that will, regrettably, continue to occur until the servicing is back in line.

It is important to note that since the turbines were put in place in late December, in addition to shutting down the South District power station during silent hours, the GEA have managed to move the servicing agenda forward considerably.

- At Waterport power station No 3 foundation set has been repaired as this set was sinking. This was completed last week on Tuesday.

- The plan at the moment, once these repairs have been verified, is to start the major overhaul of No 1 set which is 10,000 hours overdue. This will take 12/14 weeks.

- The next engine that is programmed is No 2 set which currently has run 8,000 hours over the recommended 12,000 hours for a major overhaul.

- In the autumn, before the next winter peak, No 3 set will be serviced which is currently 4,000 hours overdue of a major overhaul.

- At South District Power Station, No 5 set has been restored and the overhaul of No 1 set has started.

- This will continue with No 1 overhaul and No 6 repairs over the next few months.

- Temporary generators have been installed, in the Radiator compound, to allow the removal of the temporary generators in the Waterport backyard.

- One noticeable point of the work done in the South District Power Station is that the constant grey smoke that had been emanating from it for the last three years, because we could not afford to stop these engines, has now been eliminated.

There are times when spurious or intermittent faults occur which are the most difficult to identify and to correct, as the fault only occurs under certain conditions and then it seems to disappear until it reoccurs.

The reason the shorter power cuts occur is because at present we do not have sufficient spare capacity to operate running spinning reserve. Moreover, consideration would also have to be given to the additional fuel and servicing cost involved (reason why it was never been implemented before) and the environmental impact of running more engines using diesel than actually needed. This would entail operating additional engines above the demand required as a precaution designed to cater for any such eventuality.

Gibraltar is moving to resolve these issues that the Government has inherited but we are not there yet and we will not get there until we replace the three aging power stations which, as we all know, should have been replaced a very long time ago. However, the recent power cuts would have happened anyway even if the Government had proceeded with the power generation plans of the previous administration. In the meantime, the Government has already approved funding for repairs to our electrical infrastructure.