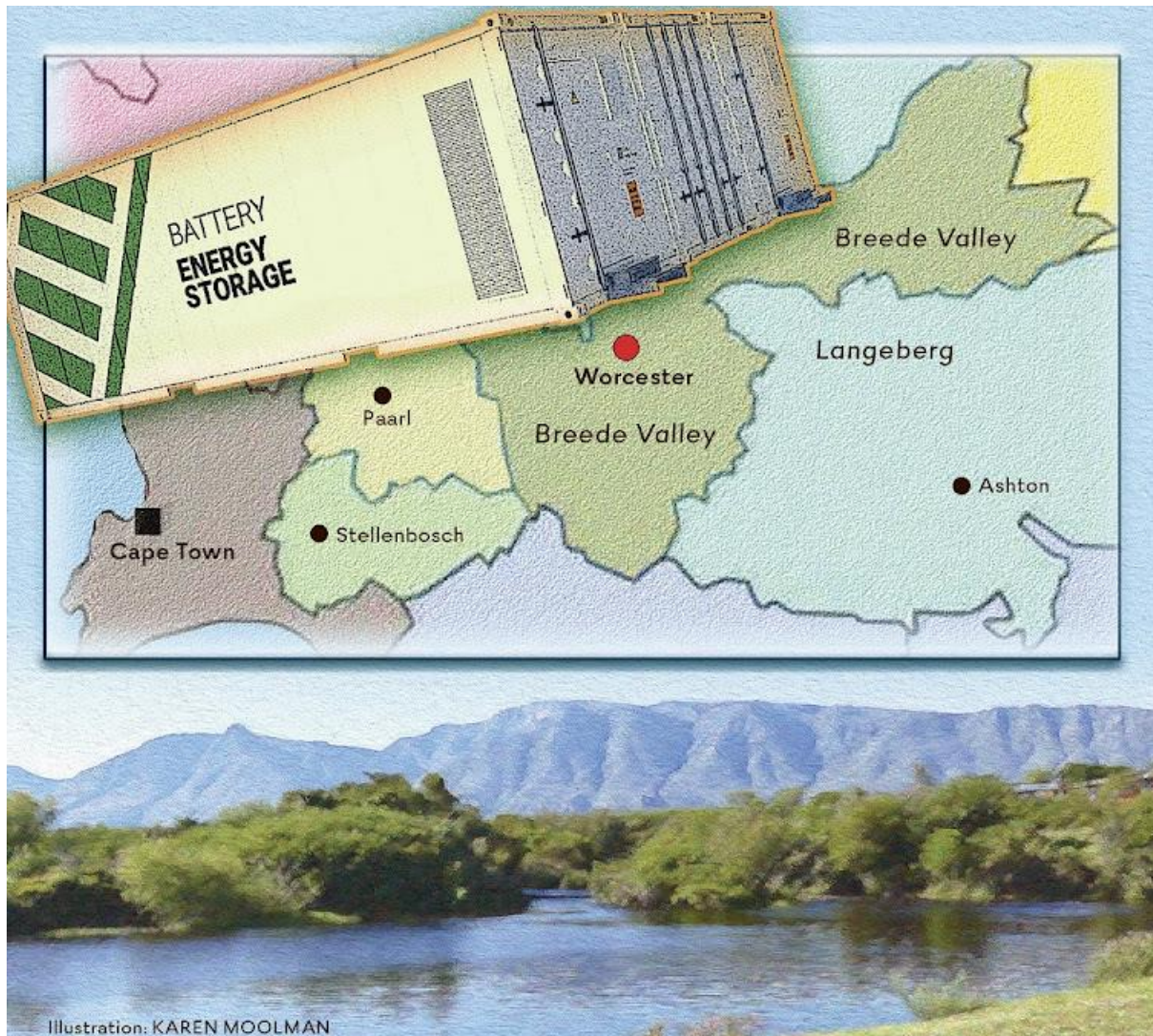


## **PRAVIN GORDHAN: Battery storage system shows SA can get things done**

### World-class facility in Breede Valley will allow Eskom to store excess power

14 NOVEMBER 2023 - 05:01  
by PRAVIN GORDHAN



Eskom's pursuit of innovative solutions to help the country end load-shedding has taken another leap forward with the launch of Africa's largest battery energy storage project.

As we look to grow the economy, boost investment and improve the lives of ordinary South Africans, it is critical for Eskom to embrace new technologies that should help us reduce the severity of the power cuts to our communities, households, businesses and industry.

This past week I had the opportunity to witness the launch of Eskom's Hex battery energy storage system (BESS) in the Western Cape's Breede Valley. This is a world-class facility, which will allow Eskom to store excess power for use during peak demand.

With this project, Eskom is demonstrating a sense of urgency that is needed to end load-shedding. If we do more of these kinds of projects in other parts of the country, which is what Eskom intends to do, we will see the end of load-shedding pretty soon.

Eskom is also showing its ability to innovate and create new ways of doing things despite the challenges that continue to confront the power utility due to the effects of state capture. We are past the time when we only think about our problems. Our energy crisis requires that we deliver concrete solutions.

The Hex site is specifically designed to store 100MWh of energy, enough to power a medium-sized town for five hours. The BESS project uses large-scale utility batteries with a capacity of 1,440MWh per day and a 60MW photovoltaic (PV) capacity and will act as a proof of concept on the delivery of battery energy storage solutions across the country.

Right now we have an electricity shortage. We need to get to a point where we have a surplus. And Eskom as an institution is going to play a crucial part in developing that surplus through the investment of the private sector in renewables and other forms of energy.

We all know that electricity is a prerequisite these days for a decent life. It is vital for our students, it is vital for our businesses, it is vital for our households. But it is also important that we understand that electricity is indispensable for proper economic growth and inclusive economic growth. Electricity is a catalyst for people to invest in different parts of the country to create jobs.

So the launch of the Eskom Hex BESS is a very useful demonstration of the fact that we can think, we can talk and we can deliver.

It is also a yardstick of whether Eskom can do the work or not. The transformation that is now under way at Eskom, which will see the creation of three wholly owned subsidiaries — generation, transmission and distribution — underscores our intent as the government to resolve the energy crisis.

The 120 battery banks that make up this BESS cost us a fair amount of money — about R830m — and during the construction 255 residents of the greater Worcester area were employed. But this is just a start, a proof of concept. We greatly appreciate the support from the funders, the African Development Bank, the New Development Bank and the World Bank, which helped finance this project.

The proof of concept means that the experiences and the lessons that we learn from the Hex project we can use elsewhere, making whatever changes are necessary so that Eskom can drive even more success.

Our aim as a government is that we must have enough electricity for energy security. So there must be a reserve, just like you have in a savings account for a day when you need some cash. In the same way, you need an energy reserve because you don't know when you are going to need extra energy.

I have just come back from the US, where I attended an investment conference. Some people think we talk a lot in SA but we do not get things done. It is this kind of project that creates hope to overcome those misperceptions. It creates hope that sooner rather than later we are going to overcome the challenges of load-shedding. We are going to grow economically. We are going to create more jobs. We are going to get more investment.

However, being South African, we must also understand the difficult moments we have had, and how we have overcome them to get to a point where we can see the most modern of the BESS projects launched. We need to see this as part of a wider set of changes that we often do not appreciate but which are taking place in SA. We think that we are all wasting time, we think that we are not delivering, and nothing exciting is happening.

Yet this is demonstration to our own people and citizens, and the globe, that South Africans are innovative and can deliver world-class solutions like the one that Eskom has delivered.

This battery project fits into this backdrop of many things that are happening, all of which require lots of attention, lots of planning, lots of commitment and the right kind of people to undertake them.

It is important that we focus on what is best for the country and what is best for our people. We now know from the recent census that there are 62-million of us who must be the beneficiaries of these sorts of projects and of the work that we do.

Eskom initiated the BESS initiative in July 2022, and in just over a year it was able to complete a project that showcases the benefits of BESS technology to the country, most particularly as it begins transitioning to cleaner energy sources.

BESS technology will help improve grid stability and underscores our commitment to the just energy transition. We all know that climate change is a clear and present danger, requiring our intense focus as we push ahead with the transformation and development of our economy.

Eskom intends to pursue similar projects in the Northern Cape, the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. Some of them are ready to take off. This should give all of us hope that in time load-shedding will be a thing of the past. We owe this to this generation and to those that follow.

- *Pravin Gordhan is the minister of public enterprises.*

<https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/opinion/2023-11-14-pravin-gordhan-battery-storage-system-shows-sa-can-get-things-done/>