

A two-year-old Indian boy stuck in a narrow well for more than four days was pulled out dead on Tuesday, triggering protests over delays in reaching the toddler, AFP wrote.

Electricity, when it arrived in Nosisi Rasmeni's life, seemed to promise a better future.

Like most black South Africans who grew up during *apartheid*, she was raised with gas stoves, candles and paraffin heaters. Her family's shack was poorly lit and smelled of fumes. "Electricity was only for whites," said Rasmeni, 37, the Guardian reported.

This changed when the African National Congress (ANC) took office in 1994 and began a sweeping program of service delivery. Within a few years, Rasmeni's neighborhood in Khayelitsha, an informal settlement on the outskirts of Cape Town, had been hooked to the grid.

"Everything," Rasmeni recalls, "was so bright."

But now a series of price hikes by the national utility, plagued by corruption and mismanagement under the ANC, is making electricity unaffordable for many of South Africa's people, pushing millions back into energy poverty, undermining more than two decades of progress and posing a range of health and safety risks.

"We're going backwards," Rasmeni said, sitting outside the small shack where she now lives with her three children.

"It's like we're living in the past."

Electricity prices in South Africa have roughly tripled in real terms over the past decade, said Dirk de Vos, an energy analyst. Tariffs recently approved by the government will see prices rise by a further 25 percent in the next three years.

The national utility, Eskom, produces about 95 percent of South Africa's electricity. It is currently more than 420 billion rand (\$22bn) in debt, equivalent to about eight percent of South Africa's gross domestic product (GDP).

A parliamentary investigation has revealed how Eskom was targeted by unscrupulous officials under the administration of former president Jacob Zuma,

## Electricity price hikes leaving millions of South Africans in dark



NIC BOTHMA/EPA

costing the utility billions and driving an exodus of skilled staff. Eskom has also featured prominently in an ongoing inquiry of alleged corruption at the highest levels of government, known locally as 'state capture'.

The price hikes are part of an urgent strategy to revive the utility but have placed a growing burden on consumers, particularly those who cannot afford to supplement with renewable energy.

"Failure at the macro level is deepening inequality," said Lauren Hermans, the founder of an energy consultancy

called Adapt.

About half of South Africa's population lives below the poverty line, with unemployment nearing 28 percent. The nation's income inequality ranks among the highest on Earth.

"A privileged minority will be able to take care of themselves," Hermans added.

"People who can't will be incapacitated."

While more than 90 percent of households nationally have access to electricity — nearly three times

as many as at the end of *apartheid* — most poorer households continue using fuels like gas and paraffin, a phenomenon known as 'energy stacking'.

"We are worried as a community," said Thandiwe Nyaba, a single mother who works as an informal trader in Khayelitsha.

"If this carries on we will use electricity for lights only."

Five years ago, she said, she could buy a month's electricity for less than about £8. The same amount now lasts less than two weeks.

High-voltage power lines cut through the area of Khayelitsha where she and Rasmeni live, a crowded section of government houses and shanties backing onto a national highway. Thinner cables, many of them illegal connections by shack dwellers, spider between the homes.

With winter approaching in the southern hemisphere, many residents have begun burning paraffin to keep warm.

"As long as the electricity [price] is up, people are buying," said Mohamed Huur, at the convenience shop on Rasmeni's corner.

Paraffin is one of the leading causes of poisoning among South African children and a severe fire hazard. Each year, thousands of people are left homeless by fires in informal settlements. A fire last December destroyed hundreds of houses just three kilometers from where Rasmeni lives.

"If people are swapping to paraffin and open flames, inherently the risk will increase," said Dr. Richard Walls, head of the Fire Engineering Research Unit at Stellenbosch University.

Two years ago, Rasmeni began using the fuel as she was no longer able to afford electricity for heating. Her youngest son, aged three, suffers from asthma, wheezing painfully when fumes fill the room.

"It looks like he's going to die," said Rasmeni, who often rushes him to the nearest clinic for treatment.

On a recent night they caught a taxi

there but were turned away — crippling power outages, another symptom of Eskom's malaise, had struck Khayelitsha.

"We think of the electricity crisis purely as impacting business and the economy, but there are widespread impacts on people and their health," said Dr. Atiya Mosam from Wits University School of Public Health.

"There's two issues," Mosam explained.

"Paraffin and other fuels are harmful to communities, while having no electricity has other negative health consequences."

These ranged from power failures affecting patient care at hospitals to blackouts making neighborhoods less safe at night, "increasing the burden of injury and violence," Mosam said.

"Energy is supposed to support socioeconomic development — if it isn't, you have to reform the system," said Jesse Burton, an energy researcher at the University of Cape Town.

In May, the ANC won national elections, although suffered its worst-ever showing at the polls. South Africa's president, Cyril Ramaphosa, has pledged to root out corruption and revive state enterprises like Eskom, but faces fierce opposition from a rival faction within his party.

Rasmeni still remembers the 1994 elections, when her parents rose before dawn to vote.

"They were voting for change," she said, "and when electricity came we saw the change."

"This year, for the first time, she chose not to support the ANC."

"You see how we're living," she said. "Why must I vote?"

In her kitchen is a large electric oven that she has not used in two years. A two-burner gas stove is balanced on top of it.

"I used to be able to bake or make roasts," Rasmeni said, her gaze falling on the appliances.

"It feels like being robbed."

## Vatican launches guide to tackle 'educational crisis' on gender



ALBERTO PIZZOLI/AFP

The Vatican launched into the debate on gender ideology, publishing an educational document called *'Male and Female He Created Them'* in a bid to tackle what it called "an educational crisis".

The paper is intended to help Catholic school teachers counter ideas which "deny the natural difference between a man and a woman", and is subtitled *'Towards a path of dialogue on the question of gender theory in education'*, AFP reported.

The document drawn up by the church's Education Ministry states, "It is becoming increasingly clear that we are now faced with what might accurately be called an educational crisis, especially in the field of affectivity and sexuality."

The document notes "challenges" rising from gender theory which "denies the difference and reciprocity in nature of a man and a woman and envisages a society without sexual differences, thereby eliminating the anthropological basis of the family".

Professor Roberto Zappala from Milan's Gonzague Institute said the church was trying to promote "dialogue on the question of gender in education".

Gender theory "seeks to impose a single school of thought", which determines the education of children, said Cardinal Giuseppe Versaldi, of the Congregation for Catholic doctrine.

The theory "leads to educational programs and legislative orientations that promote a personal identity and emotional intimacy separated from the biological difference between male and female," Versaldi said.

The document, which supports the role of mother and father in a traditional family, outlines "the Christian vision of anthropology [which] sees sexuality as a fundamental component of one's personhood."

"It is from [their] sex that the human person receives the characteristics which, on the biological, psychological and spiritual levels, make that person a man or a woman."

The document is to be distributed internationally across the Catholic educational system.

Miyako Shirakawa was a 19-year-old college student when she was raped by an older man. She said that when the attack started, her mind went blank and she froze up.

"When I became aware, he was on top of me," said Shirakawa, 54, now a psychiatrist who treats sexual abuse victims, Reuters reported.

"That type of response — it's a form of psychological self-protection," added Shirakawa, who became pregnant because of the rape, which she didn't report to police, and had an abortion.

But under Japanese law, not fighting back can make it impossible for prosecutors to prove rape.

Legislators revised Japan's century-old rape law in 2017 to include harsher penalties and other changes. The reforms, however, left intact controversial requirements that prosecutors must prove that violence or intimidation was involved or that the victim was "incapable of resistance."

A recent series of acquittals has revived outrage over that legal standard, which Shirakawa and other critics say places an unfairly high burden on victims, deterring them from coming forward and hurting their chances in court if they do.

They say the law must be revisited to make all non-consensual sex a crime, without exception, as it is in other developed countries such as Britain, Germany and Canada.

"Discussing sexual violence from the victim's viewpoint is a world trend, and it's time to reform the Japanese legal system and society that cannot do that," said Minoru Kitahara, an author and activist who is among the organizers of protests against the recent rulings.

One such ruling came in March, when a court in Nagoya, central Japan, acquitted a father accused of raping his 19-year-old daughter.

According to a copy of the verdict seen by Reuters, the court recognized that the sex was non-consensual, that the father had physically and sexually abused the victim when she was younger and that he had used force. But the judges concluded that doubt remained as to whether she had no option other than to submit. The case is under appeal.

"The verdict was extremely strict about proving psychological incapacity to resist," said Tomoko Murata, a lawyer who handles sexual assault cases.

Activists are holding monthly demonstrations in which participants grasp flowers as a symbol of protest.

ity bureau showed nearly 60 percent of female victims of forced sex kept it to themselves.

"My patients are afraid, and there are many who feel it is impossible to make a legal case, so all they can do is cry themselves to sleep," Shirakawa said. Murata said the acquittals would fur-

## Outrage at acquittals in rape cases sparks calls to fix Japanese law



THE ASAHI SHIMBUN

"The media are reporting about the verdicts and the protests. The increase in the number of people who think that this situation is wrong will give strength to those who cannot speak of their own suffering," Jun Yamamoto, head of sexual assault victims group Spring and a victim herself, told Reuters.

In May, Spring presented the Justice Ministry and Supreme Court with demands for legal reforms.

### Silenced by fear

The #MeToo movement has been mostly subdued in Japan, and only 2.8 percent of sexual assault victims tell police, often for fear of being blamed themselves and publicly shamed.

Many tell no one at all. A 2017 report by the government's gender equal-

ther discourage victims from seeking help from the legal system.

"In dealing with police, prosecutors and courts, the law is so strict and a guilty verdict so difficult that the victim begins to suffer," she said.

"The repercussions of such verdicts are huge."

Behind the legal burden, experts say, is a traditional view that women are responsible for protecting their chastity. Japan's rape law was introduced before women could vote and its main intent was to protect family honor and pedigree, legal experts say.

"The idea is women must resist to the very limit. That is at the heart of this kind of ruling," Murata said.

"And there is still the view that 'No means Yes.' It is not yet the common view that a woman's agreement is

necessary before having sex."

### Reforms

The 2017 reforms widened the definition of "forced sexual intercourse", thus including men as victims; lengthened the minimum prison sentence to five years from three; and enabled prosecution even if the victim did not press charges.

It also dropped the requirement that rape of a person under the age of 18 by a parent or guardian must involve violence, intimidation or incapacity to resist to be considered a crime.

Proposals to do the same for adults failed partly because of concerns that doing so would lead to an increase in false charges. Critics say there's no evidence that is true — the social, psychological and legal barriers to prosecuting a case are too high.

"Proof the sex was non-consensual would still be required, so I don't think false charges would increase," Murata said.

Justice Minister Takashi Yamashita, asked about the calls for reforms, told a parliamentary panel last month that his ministry would assess the current situation and consider what action to take. But he gave no deadline for a decision.

"We must cautiously consider the impact of completely removing the requirement (to prove) violence or intimidation," he said in reply to questions from an opposition lawmaker.

When reforms were enacted in 2017, parliament called for a review after three years, and activists hope the public outrage will bolster pressure for additional changes.

Some members of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's ruling Liberal Democratic Party are taking an interest in the topic, forming a group called "Caucus for a Society Without Sexual Violence."

"I felt that the verdicts were unbelievable, impossible," Chihiro Ito, 29, a victim of attempted rape who is a member of Spring, told Reuters.

"But there are also positive aspects for Spring. The view of ordinary people, the decent reaction that in common sense terms, these verdicts are wrong is spreading in society," she said.

"It would be good if that triggers debate in society and leads to reform."