

POWER FEARS IN NEW DELUGE

By ASHLEY ARGOON, KIERAN ROONEY

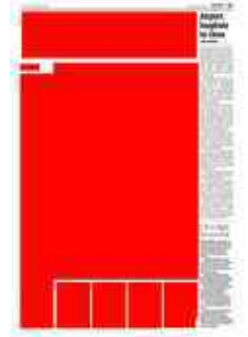
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THERE are fears another heavy downpour could flood a mine that fuels power for almost a quarter of the state.

Authorities are on high alert after cracks were discovered in the mine that fuels Yalourn Power Station, which provides 22 per cent of Victoria's electricity.

Energy Minister Lily D'Ambrosio on Monday said flooding would "put the mine and certainly the power station in a debilitated state for many, many weeks, if not months".

Across the next seven days, Victoria should have enough energy through the national grid to avoid blackouts, according to the Australian Energy Market Operator.

But Emergency Management Commissioner Andrew Crisp warned more wet weather was expected towards the end of the week, with the possibility flooded areas could be hit again.

"Given we've already got extremely saturated ground, and we've already got flooding in some particular areas, there is a very real chance that we

will move from minor to moderate, and even in some areas, moderate to major flooding," he said.

It comes as it emerges 35 homes in the Dandenongs township of Kalorama were destroyed by fallen trees and 24,000 Victorian properties continued to go without power almost a week after horror storms lashed the state.

The home of Acting Premier James Merlino was among those hit by blackouts, with power expected to be restored to all but about 100 properties by the end of the week.

Emergency services declared at least 35 houses uninhabitable in Kalorama alone, meaning one in every 14 family homes there was destroyed during Wednesday's gale-force winds.

Braeden Tairi, his wife, Bri, and parents were having dinner as the couple's baby, Levi, slept when a 60m tree ploughed through their lounge room.

"Had we been sitting on the couch we'd all be dead," Mr Tairi said. "It's by God's grace alone that we're here to talk about it."

The family tried to flee but giant trees strewn across the road prevented their escape.

They spent the night in their car, parked at the Mt Dandenong shopping strip.

"Kalorama basically was just like a bomb had gone off," Mr Tairi said.

Their home of more than 2½ years will have to be demolished and rebuilt.

The Herald Sun believes Victorian authorities were speaking to the Defence Force

about sending in soldiers to help clean up storm-ravaged towns.

More than 420 SES volunteers and fire services and contract staff were already working on roads in the Dandenong Ranges on Monday.

Authorities were also talking to their NSW counterparts about sending emergency crews to flood-stricken Gippsland.

The hardest-hit communities have lashed energy providers after many suffered a week without drinking water.

Pat Joyce, who has not had running water at her Loch home since last Tuesday, said her family were in a "desperate situation".

"It is like we are living in the Dark Ages, I really don't know

what to do," she said.

"We have had to throw out all of our food, I haven't showered since Tuesday. It is not right that this power mob hasn't fixed this problem."

Mr Merlino said the storm was "truly devastating" and that he'd seen the damage first-hand in his own community and during a visit to Gippsland.

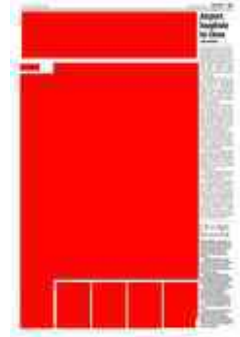
"This is a really challenging time for people in affected areas and I want to reassure them that everything is being done to keep them safe and ensure we get communities up and running again as quickly as possible," he said.

Opposition Emergency Services spokesman Tim Smith said the government had not properly managed the crisis.

"The Andrews Labor government is more interested in forcing Victorians to wear masks outdoors while alone than getting the lights back on for so many hardworking families who have just endured Labor's fourth lockdown," he said.

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**ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY
MELISSA IARIA AND MITCH RYAN**



Kalorama's Braeden and Bri Tairi and son Levi (top) and (above) the storm's aftermath. Pictures: Wayne Taylor, Nikki Connolly