

Sarkozy in a bid for power

French keen to bag energy contracts

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French president Nicolas Sarkozy has given an undertaking to back France's energy companies to win the bid to build Eskom's nuclear and power stations.

Sarkozy made the announcement at the close of South Africa-France Business Forum, signifying his top level backing for French energy companies that have accompanied him to Cape Town on his two-day state visit.

The French president admitted that he had brought a diverse group of energy companies, an unusual practice in French business circles.

Sarkozy, who has committed several engineers to come to South Africa next week, said they would work with South Africa to solve the energy crisis.

French company Areva was bidding against a US company to build a nuclear power plant as part of government's plans



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to solve South Africa's energy crisis.

Areva head Anne Lauvergeon told the business forum that her company would not spare any efforts to help power utility Eskom.

"The only thing stopping us is the tender process," said Lauvergeon, who was also the head of the French business delegation.

A French company has already been awarded a contract to supply Eskom with turbines at the cost of R13 billion, as the utility embarks on its build programme which will see two power stations in Limpopo and Mpumalanga being completed in 2012.

Showing confidence in South Africa's economy, Sarkozy said French business wanted to invest in the country

and he wanted a 250m investment fund to be created which would focus on hi-tech and renewable energy technologies.

"We want to invest in your country ... you are the victims of your own success," said Sarkozy, parroting the SA government's line on the energy crisis.

The South Africa-France Business forum has since identified energy, transport, tourism and skills as priority areas.

Nuclear Energy Corporation of South Africa chief executive Rob Adams had told the forum of the country's plan to increase nuclear capacity and to develop a uranium fuel industry.

Transnet chief executive Maria Ramos also outlined multi-billion-rand plans to improve the rail and ports infrastructure. The French have offered to work closely with South Africa as it bids to improve its infrastructural transport programme.

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