



- The government has admitted to errors in tendering at the private residence of President Jacob Zuma at his family homestead in Nkandla, KwaZulu-Natal. Public Works Minister Thulas Nxesi launched a task team in November 2012 and its report, released on Sunday, said there was no evidence that public money was spent to build the private residence of Mr Zuma. The minister said R206m was spent overall on the Nkandla security upgrades – R71m on Mr Zuma’s residence itself and R135m on operational needs of state departments. These included security and evacuation systems, firefighting capabilities, medical facilities and staff accommodation. Political commentators said the report created more questions than answers, especially when it came to the sources of the money spent. Mr Nxesi said the renovations of Mr Zuma’s home began in 2008 before he was elected president.
- Cosatu in Gauteng said it was planning renewed protests against e-tolling, starting in February. The protest is to start on February 11 and the action would be carried out in other provinces to ensure it became a ‘national act’. The second protest would be held on February 25, the same day as the opening of the Gauteng legislature. The third protest would be held on March 7, the anniversary of Cosatu’s nationwide strike against e-tolling and labour broking last year. Last Friday the high court in Pretoria granted the Opposition to Urban Tolling Alliance (Outa) leave to take the matter to the Supreme Court of Appeal in Bloemfontein. Outa had applied to appeal against a December 13 high court judgment which dismissed its bid to have the electronic tolling of Gauteng’s major roads scrapped.
- Julius Malema, the former ANCYL president, has until February 18 to indicate whether he will oppose an application by SARS to have his estate sequestered. SARS said in court papers before the North Gauteng High Court that Mr Malema was factually insolvent and that it would be to the benefit of his creditors to have his estate placed in the hands of a curator appointed by the master of the court.
- Numsa called for the nationalisation of coal mines to mitigate the rocketing electricity prices. Numsa general secretary Irvin Jim said this week the union had opposed Eskom in its application to Nersa, and that the proposed 16% tariff hikes for the next five years would lead to job losses, factory closures and increases in the cost of consumer goods. SA’s electricity prices had rocketed by more than 170% over the past five years, while administered prices in other Brics countries had decreased more than 36% in the past decade. The price increases had contributed to the closure of 440 000 small businesses in the five years to 2011.
- Thousands of former gold miners suffering from silicosis have launched a class action suit in SA, in what could prove to be a further setback to the country’s vital mining sector. Already buckling under huge operational costs and seemingly endless labour unrest, about 30 gold-mine operators were last month served with litigation by thousands of their former employees. The plaintiffs allegedly contracted the lung disease while drilling gold-bearing rocks. Theirs is the biggest class action in SA’s legal history, involving more than 17 000 complainants. The list is growing by about 500 people each month. Academic calculations estimate about 280 000 people have worked in gold mines for a minimum of 10 years, long enough to inhale dangerous levels of silica dust.
- Democratic Alliance leader Helen Zille has asked President Jacob Zuma to appoint a judicial commission of inquiry to investigate state funding of the pro-government newspaper *The New Age*. The newspaper is owned by the Gupta family, who are benefactors of the president and the ANC. Ms Zille said at a media briefing that an inquiry was necessary to uncover the extent and legality of the funding. She said all the evidence points to the ANC using public money to fund a newspaper which is openly favourable to the government. The DA has calculated that 77% of the newspaper’s advertising revenue came from government advertising, even though its circulation figures have not been audited.
- The Employment Conditions Commission, which makes recommendations on minimum wages, looks set to suggest a new minimum wage of about R105 a day for farm workers – a hefty rise of more than 50%. Farm workers last week called off their strike in the Western Cape but Cosatu has threatened to rekindle it, claiming farmers are dismissing their workers for being absent from work. According to research on which the recommendation is based, the wage increase will lead to higher prices for some products in the short to medium term – and significant job losses. In the long term, it is envisaged that agriculture will experience structural adjustment away from the labour model to one that is more concentrated, mechanised and employs better-paid workers.
- Houses have become much more affordable since 2008 and the ratio of first time house buyers to the total has increased significantly since then, according to FNB. The FNB Estate Agent survey also showed that the ratio of black, coloured and Indian house buyers to the total improved slightly last year, after rising significantly between 2005 and 2008. The ratio of black, coloured and Indian buyers in suburban areas nudged up to 49.2% of the total in 2012, compared to 46.2% in 2011 and 43% in 2005. **end**