



Friday@Noon

A weekly electronic news briefing for the business community
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Institute for
Futures Research

Instituut vir
Toekomsnavorsing



Issue 953

29 Nov 2013

- ANC treasurer-general Zweli Mkhize this week took aim at pessimists in SA, insisting that despite the serious challenges facing the country, SA was not facing an 'Arab Spring' uprising. Addressing the Cape Town Press Club on the issues surrounding the NDP, Mr Mkhize said too many, including some of the ANC's trade union alliance partners, were concentrating on only the aspects of the plan they disagreed with rather than expressing support for the plan. Mr Mkhize, a former premier of KwaZulu-Natal and health MEC in the province, said immediately after 1994 he had served in the government of provincial unity. The strength of this was that South Africans defined themselves about what could be achieved together rather than their differences. He said the optimists would be the ones to find a purely South African solution – not those who said that the enormity of the challenges could finish the country.
- The leaders of the official opposition DA have agreed on a major shift in the party's policy on redress by accepting that race has to be a proxy for disadvantage. The decision by the party's federal council during a policy conference marks a change in direction from the DA's previous firm rejection of all references to race in favour of a policy promoting 'diversity'. It creates an election platform for the DA to woo black voters in next year's election, but this is also likely to fuel discontent both among its traditional liberal members, who support the ideal of individual rights and non-racialism as contained in the SA Constitution, and its right-wing faction. DA leader Helen Zille said the party policy was 'unashamedly that black advancement benefits everyone and if any South African doesn't like that idea then there are many other parties to choose from'.
- Numsa is set to replace its president, Cedric Gina, at its special congress next month. Numsa's move to sever ties with the ANC has pitted its top leaders, Mr Gina and general secretary Irvin Jim, against each other in a vociferous public battle. The union on Tuesday accepted Mr Gina's resignation. He resigned on Monday, saying he could no longer in good conscience be part of what was happening in the union. Numsa came out in defence of Mr Jim, whom Mr Gina had criticised for the manner in which he ran the union. Numsa deputy general secretary Karl Cloete said Mr Jim carried out his duties, even at risk to his own life. Numsa will lodge a complaint with the Hawks on Tuesday over a threat to Mr Jim's life made on Facebook.
- The Legal Resources Centre (LRC) has filed court papers against Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga in its latest bid to compel her to appoint teachers in the Eastern Cape. The application, before the high court in Grahamstown, is in two parts. The first is an urgent application by the school governing bodies of 32 schools for reimbursement of R25m they have paid to 150 teachers that the Department of Basic Education failed to pay. The second is a class action for all Eastern Cape schools whose teaching posts allocated for next year have not been permanently filled. Despite three court orders, the department has failed to permanently appoint and pay teachers in the province. The minister and the department have been given until next Friday to indicate whether they will oppose the urgent application, which will be heard on January 23. The teachers have not been paid by the department, despite it appointing them to permanent positions. The governing bodies seek a declaration that, if the department fails to pay the schools within 30 days, they be authorised to attach property to pay the debt.
- Real gross domestic product (GDP) at market prices increased at a much weaker than expected 0.7% in the third quarter of 2013, compared with revised growth of 3.2% growth in the second quarter. Economists described the figures as dismal, confirming the economy is under serious pressure. Manufacturing was, as expected, a drag on economic growth, following strikes in vehicle manufacturing in the third quarter. Manufacturing shrank 6.6%, pulling overall GDP growth down by one percentage point. Economists expected GDP to grow by 1.2%. Positive contributions came from the mining and quarrying sector, as well as finance, real estate and business services; wholesale, retail and motor trade, catering and accommodation; and transport. Growth is expected to gain momentum in the fourth quarter since the widespread strikes experienced in the third quarter have been resolved.
- Almost 92% of taxpayers who are obliged to submit a tax return this year made Friday's deadline. This is an increase of 5.5% from the previous year. SARS spokesman Adrian Lackay said more than 6m returns were submitted by the deadline for non-provisional taxpayers on Friday. These included 1.55m outstanding tax returns from previous years. Overall, 13% more returns were submitted this year by the deadline than in 2012. Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan said in a statement that the growth in the number of tax returns filed, despite an increase in the threshold for submitting a return from R120 000 to R250 000, showed continued growth in tax compliance by South Africans. SARS had paid refunds of more than R14bn since the start of the annual tax season on July 1. It paid almost 95% of these within three days. The use of electronic submissions has resulted in 94.8% of returns filed being assessed with 3 seconds.

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