



# Friday @ Noon

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- Jobs and the economy will be the major focus of the ANC's 2014 national elections manifesto, the party's secretary-general, Gwede Mantashe, said earlier this week. The manifesto, expected to be unveiled today in Nelspruit, Mpumalanga, will be officially launched at a rally at Mbombela Stadium on Saturday. The focus on jobs and economic growth comes as the ANC government this year launched the youth wage subsidy, a scheme to reward business for employing young people who are first-time job seekers. Political analysts said the ANC's move signalled a realisation that the youth vote would be crucial in this year's elections. The party needed to be seen to be talking about the aspirations of the masses of disgruntled young people, who play a central role in violent service delivery protests. Indications are that the ANC would look to the government's trillion-rand infrastructure roll-out plan to unlock job opportunities, and continue to use incentives to encourage the private sector to employ more people.
- Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga announced a 78.2% matric pass rate for 2013, up from 60.6% when she took over as minister in 2009. A total of 30.6% obtained bachelor's passes, which qualify them for a university place. A total of 562 112 full-time pupils sat for the exam. Nationally, the 78.2% pass rate was up from 73.9% in 2012, and reflected steep improvements in provinces such as the Free State and North West. Despite the dramatic improvement, analysts warned of a shortage of jobs and university places. SA Chamber of Commerce and Industry COO Peggy Drodskie warned that businesses would not be able to employ people who had limited skills. While the results were acknowledged by Umalusi, its chairman Sizwe Mabizela said much work still had to be done to improve the standard of education. Almost three-quarters of those who qualified for university study did not meet the minimum requirements in maths and science for the degrees that provide scarce skills for economic growth and to remain economically competitive.
- The process followed by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries in allocating this year's commercial fishing rights to eight industry segments, was fundamentally flawed and arbitrary, according to fishing law experts. The department insists it followed a rigorous and audited allocations process. Last week it named the successful applicants for fishing rights in the KwaZulu-Natal prawn trawl as well as the demersal shark, squid, tuna pole-line, hake land-line, white mussel, traditional line fish and oyster segments. This caused an uproar among those fishermen who failed to get rights. Of the 3 490 applications, only about 600 led to rights being granted and of the 1 556 applications for traditional line fish only 215 succeeded. Many who failed to get rights are well-established fishermen who no longer have a livelihood. The fishermen are threatening to go to court to seek an urgent interdict against the rights allocation process. The department has implemented an interim solution in the meantime with commercial line fishermen being allowed to continue fishing while Minister Tina Joemat-Pettersson adjudicates their fishing-licence appeals.
- Another scandal may be brewing over President Jacob Zuma's controversial rural homestead, which has already cost the state R206m to upgrade. Public Protector Thuli Madonsela's views about the upgrade and whether the president should contribute to its costs are due to be revealed later this month when she releases her much anticipated report on Nkandla. It has emerged from written replies to parliamentary questions that the Department of Public Works was also responsible for the electricity bill and is putting in place a maintenance plan for state property for 2014 that may involve structures at Mr Zuma's Nkandla compound. Public works spokesman Thami Mchunu said that the department was only responsible for the maintenance of state houses and that Nkandla was regarded as a private residence of the president.
- The Arms Procurement Commission has called former president Thabo Mbeki and his key Cabinet ministers to testify, as the inquiry shifts focus to allegations of fraud and corruption, and the controversial industrial offset programme. Mr Mbeki will be questioned in the middle of May as head of the Cabinet sub-committee that recommended that the arms deal go ahead. Apart from the former president, former finance minister and now National Planning Minister Trevor Manuel and former trade and industry minister Alec Erwin, will appear before the commission of inquiry later this month.
- The rand may stay weaker than R10/\$ for the next five years at least, rather than bouncing back as it did in 2003 and 2008. Analysts warned this week that a prolonged bout of currency weakness, while supportive of exports, could fuel inflation and hurt SA's growth prospects. Together with the Turkish lira and Argentinian peso, the rand has been the weakest global currency over the past month and one of the poorest performers of emerging market currencies over the past year, having lost more than 25% of its value against the US dollar. Currently, the rand is at its worst level since 2008, surpassing the 2001 trough and possibly breaking below the support that came through in 2008. Economists do not expect factors that may boost the rand to emerge any time soon. IMF MD Christine Lagarde said this week in Nairobi that sub-Saharan Africa is vulnerable to a slowdown in emerging markets, which will weigh on the region's currencies. **End**