

Power brokers invade Hermanus



New US ambassador to South Africa Brent Bozell was a surprise keynote speaker. PHOTOS: Carl de Villiers



Democratic Alliance mayoral candidate in Johannesburg Helen Zille interacts with one of the 600 delegates who attended.

CARL DE VILLIERS

For three days this week, Hermanus became the headquarters of leading South African and international minds in the business, economic, and policymaking sectors, who cluster-bombed more than 600 delegates with cutting-edge knowledge and information.

The brainchild of local business guru Alec Hogg, the annual BizNews Conference was founded in 2020, inspired by the collaborative spirit of the World Economic Forum. This prompted Hogg to create a 'mini-Davos' specifically for South Africans, where experts in various

key fields gather to discuss, debate, and solve challenges of the day in an independent environment.

This year's conference, held at the Overstrand Municipality grounds, assembled 27 high-powered South African and global business and political leaders to share their insights and lead panel discussions focused on future scenarios in a volatile world.

After an investing masterclass on the opening day on Tuesday, discussions shifted to politics with a surprise keynote address by the new United States ambassador to South Africa, Brent Bozell. His attendance was kept under wraps

until the last minute for security reasons.

Avoiding the issue of the Iran war, Bozell instead focused on the strained SA-US political relationship. He emphasised that beyond the noise and governmental disagreements, the US government wants to expand the long-standing, mutually beneficial economic and commercial ties between the two countries.

He noted that US investment in South Africa has accelerated over the years, creating much-needed jobs, an acknowledgement of the country's status as Africa's economic powerhouse, driven in part

by innovation and technological expertise.

Bozell added that there was no reason for expanded investment in South Africa to stall, as the country still offers vast untapped potential.

However, he stressed that it was necessary to lower the political temperature that is causing disruption. In this regard, he said the South African government needed to step up in providing greater clarity on key issues, noting that in some instances it had failed to respond to trade proposals for more than a year.

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Experts unpack future scenarios for South Africa

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Among those sharing their views in the session titled *Quo Vadis South Africa?* were Helen Zille, chairperson of the Democratic Alliance (DA) Federal Council, and leader of the Freedom Front Plus, Corné Mulder.

Zille explained that her decision to step down from her Federal Council position to run as the DA's mayoral candidate in Johannesburg was driven by the city's dramatic infrastructure collapse under what she described as corrupt and inept leadership.

She warned that the country's

commercial capital was nearing a point of no return and required urgent intervention to restore its full potential. Her underlying message was that overcoming voter apathy in this year's local government elections would be crucial to securing responsible, capable leadership that honours the social contract with citizens.

Zille also criticised the proliferation of small splinter parties, arguing that they wield disproportionate power in coalition governments and can destabilise otherwise stable administrations in pursuit of short-term, self-serving interests. (Incidentally, on Tuesday the Independent

Electoral Commission of South Africa announced that the number of registered political parties in the country now stands at 508, following the registration of 20 new parties between October and February.)

Other sessions exploring the future of the South African economy, political landscape and the state of the nation on Wednesday and Thursday featured several prominent speakers, including Herman Mashaba of ActionSA, entrepreneur and commentator Rob Hersov, and economic analysts Dawie Roodt (Efficient Group), Magnus Heystek (Brenthurst Wealth) and Iraj Abedian (Pan-African Investment and Research Services). ■



At the conference were Sean McLaughlin of UK-based Epiq Insights and Analytics and Overstrand councillor and businessman Clinton Lerm.



Trevor Edwards (Hermanus Business Chamber) with Hermanus residents John Callender-Easby and Mechiel du Toit.



ABOVE: Renowned economist Iraj Abedian and Anthony Ginsberg of US-based Ginsglobal.

LEFT: Directing proceedings at the conference was BizNews founder Alec Hogg.

PHOTOS: Carl de Villiers