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Benefiting from the Malaysian experience

K.P. Waran; Satwant Singh

KUALA LUMPUR, Fri. - South Africa, impressed by Malaysia's success in overcoming the legacy of colonialism and implementing economic policies to overcome poverty, is keen to benefit from its experience.

South African President Nelson Mandela said since his country was implementing its Macro-economic Strategy for Growth Employment and Redistribution, the Malaysian experience would be valuable.

"We adopted this strategy in order to put our economy on a new and higher growth path that would create more jobs and produce the resources for reconstruction and development," he said in his public lecture, South Africa: A joint vision towards the 21st century.

The lecture held at Hotel Istana was organised by the Malaysian Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations. Also present were Foreign Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi and South African High Commissioner to Malaysia Emily Maite Mohale.

Mandela said South Africa was convinced that it had much to learn from Malaysia's experience as it restructured its economy.

He said under the vision and leadership of Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, trade between South Africa and Malaysia had expanded even more rapidly.

Mandela said his visit to Malaysia would act as a stimulus in laying the foundations for political, cultural, diplomatic and business contacts.

He said as the world moved towards a new global economic system, it was of critical importance that the benefits of increased trade and the consequences of more open markets are not enjoyed by only some at the expense of others.

Describing Malaysia as a model for the building of co-operative regional relations, Mandela said his country need not look further than Southeast Asia to promote peace and a climate for growth and development.

He said if South Africa needed an example of how particular countries can contribute to co-operative regional relations in the wake of a colonial era, it can find it in Asean.

"We see it in the way Malaysia has patiently and painstakingly worked with her neighbours to build an association to promote peace and a climate for growth and development."

Mandela said Southeast Asia was today one of the world's top economic growth areas and Asean was on the verge of including all 10 Southeast Asian nations.

"A combined population of 400 million gives members of this predominantly 'southern' association a voice that cannot be ignored."

He said as latecomers, South Africa has the advantage of learning from Malaysia's experience.

During the question-and-answer session later, Mandela said his African National Congress has been growing from strength to strength and in the November local government elections, the party secured 66 per cent of the vote which was four per cent more than what it had garnered during the national elections.

He said his government had been implementing programmes to create more jobs, build houses, schools, hospitals and provide electricity and water supply.

"It cannot be done overnight and the people of South Africa understand it.

"During the past two-and-a-half years we have set the impetus for growth which would eventually benefit everyone."

He said steps were being taken to reduce the crime rate and improve investor confidence to double the South African growth rate from today's three per cent.

Asked to comment on the role played by Malaysia including its first Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman in opposing apartheid in South Africa, Mandela said he was appreciative of Tunku's decision to sever ties with Johannesburg because of its racist policies.

He said such decisions by the Tunku and former Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru were a great inspiration to South Africans who were fighting for freedom and the preservation of human rights.

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