

08/05/1997

Dr M receives South Africa's highest award

Hardev Kaur in Cape Town

CAPE TOWN, Wed: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad received The Order of Good Hope Class 1: Grand Cross (Gold) from South African President Nelson Mandela in recognition of his personal efforts and contributions towards improving the well-being of the people of South Africa.

The award, the third to be bestowed on Dr Mahathir this year, is also in recognition of the Prime Minister's exceptional and invaluable contribution to the promotion of friendly relations between the two countries.

In March, Dr Mahathir received Saudi Arabia's King Faisal International Award, and last month, Kuwait bestowed upon him the Mubarak Al-Kabir Medal of Honour.

The citation of the latest award says in view of his efforts, Dr Mahathir "deserves the respect and recognition of the Republic of South Africa".

In a short and simple ceremony at the steps of the President's official residence, Genanendal, Dr Mahathir joins the list of recipients of the highest South African award which honours citizens of other countries.

Previous recipients include Emperor Akihito of Japan, Queen Elizabeth II, Queen Beatrix of The Netherlands, Presidents Francois Mitterrand and Jacques Chirac of France, President R.G. Mugabe of Zimbabwe, and President Kim Young-sam of South Korea.

Mandela later hosted a lunch in honour of Dr Mahathir.

The citation adds that the award is "an indication of the respect and appreciation of the Government and the people of South Africa".

It says Dr Mahathir has been a longstanding supporter of the struggle for democracy by the people of South Africa and "has made an important contribution to this struggle in the international arena."

The Prime Minister was the first head of government to personally congratulate President Mandela on his election in 1994. Since then, Dr Mahathir has "tirelessly promoted close bonds of friendship between the peoples of South Africa and Malaysia".

The "number one salesman and the champion of Malaysia", Dr Mahathir has been a consistent and strong advocate of closer involvement by Malaysian businessmen in the South African economy.

Malaysia has emerged in three short years as the fourth largest foreign investor in South Africa as well as a major trading partner. According to the citation, this has been largely due Dr Mahathir's "personal commitment and confidence in South Africa's future".

Malaysian investments in South Africa include those in the oil and gas industry by Petronas, telecommunications business by Telekom Malaysia, property and hotel projects, and banking.

In fact, after the ceremony, Dr Mahathir officiated the opening of "Serting House", a building owned by a Malaysian investor.

The citation also says that Dr Mahathir "has been and still is a source of inspiration to the developing world" through his leadership in the Non-Aligned Movement, the United Nations and other international forums.

He has also aligned himself fully with South Africa in the promotion of South-South cooperation.

Paying tribute to Dr Mahathir's efforts in developing Malaysia, the citation says that the Prime Minister "initiated and successfully

implemented a programme of promoting equal opportunities and recognition in Malaysia's multi-ethnic society, while maintaining economic growth".

Malaysia's success and achievements serve as an example to South Africa.

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