

07 MAR 1997

Mandela-Yahaya

MANDELA PAYS TRIBUTE TO LATE INDUSTRIALIST YAHAYA AHMAD

SHAH ALAM, March 7 (Bernama) -- South African President Nelson Mandela today said the sudden death of Tan Sri Yahaya Ahmad is much felt by his country because it happened at a time when the industrialist was taking a particularly keen interest in Malaysian-South African cooperation.

Speaking during a visit to the Proton plant here, Mandela said he was suppose to have met Yahaya there today in an act to further cement the fast developing business relationship that the industrialist was actively promoting between the two countries.

"It is, however, in much sadder circumstances that we now gather here...the tragic and untimely death of Yahaya is a major blow not only to Malaysia where he epitomised the economic success for which your country is internationally respected but a blow which will be as much felt by South Africans," he said in his address.

Yahaya, who died in a helicopter crash near Kuala Lipis on Monday, was the chairman of the DRB-Hicom group and a host of other companies including Perusahaan Otomobil Nasional Berhad (Proton).

"I bring to Hicom, to the Malaysian people and in particular to the family of the deceased Tan Sri Yahaya Ahmad, the heartfelt condolences of ourselves, the South African government, the South African business and of the South African people," Mandela said.

Mandela, who is on a five-day official visit to Malaysia, was received by Economic Adviser to the Government Tun Daim Zainuddin, newly appointed DRB-Hicom group chairman Datuk Mohd Saleh Sulong and senior Proton officials including its vice-chariman (operation & strategy) Tengku Mahaleel Tengku Ariff.

The South African president said his government was confident that the depth and the span of the trade and business relationships between the two countries would not be retarded or derailed by Yahaya's death.

"Yet, we cannot pretend that the tragic death of this talented and committed friend of South Africa will not leave a great void," he added.

He said on a personal level, Yahaya showed interest in establishing a motor vehicle assembly plant as well as a motorcycle manufacturing plant in South Africa.

In his address, Mandela also noted that Malaysians now constituted the fourth largest national group of foreign investors in South Africa following the improving ties after Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's visit to that country in August 1995.

Mohd Saleh, in his welcoming address, expressed confidence that a deeper understanding of Proton's operation as a result of Mandela's visit would pave the way for closer cooperation between Proton and the automotive industry in South Africa.

He said Proton was looking forward to explore the possibility of setting up a venture in South Africa to introduce the national car and motorcycle there.

Mohd Saleh later told reporters that Modenas, the manufacturer of the national motorcycle "Kriss" was looking into the possibility of exporting it to South Africa as well as establishing a manufacturing facility there. --

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