

08/03/1997

Mandela pays tribute to late Yahaya Ahmad

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SOUTH African President Nelson Mandela paid tribute to the late Proton chairman Tan Sri Yahaya Ahmad, saying the latter's vision matched the republic's ideals to empower black business.

"The tragic and untimely death of Tan Sri Yahaya is a blow much felt by the South Africans because he took a keen and active interest in Malaysia-South Africa co-operation.

"He showed interest in establishing a motor vehicle assembly plant in South Africa and he was also considering the establishment of a motor-cycle manufacturing plant in our country," he said.

Mandela was on an official visit to the Proton factory in Shah Alam yesterday.

He said Yahaya led a delegation of 250 Malaysian businessmen to South Africa in conjunction with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad's visit in August 1995.

Malaysia, he added, now constituted the fourth largest national group of foreign investors in South Africa.

In expressing his condolences to Yahaya's family and Hicom, Mandela said he was supposed to meet Yahaya with regards to his promotion of Malaysian and South African business.

He later signed the condolence book.

The new Proton chairman Datuk Mohd Saleh Sulong, who is also group chairman of DRB-Hicom, said Proton looked forward to the possibility of setting up a venture in South Africa.

Besides local production, Proton started a small assembly operation in Vietnam last year and is commencing a similar operation in the Philippines.

Proton has so far captured 62 per cent of the domestic passenger car market and will be exporting to 39 countries.

Mandela later had a closer look and was impressed with the various car models of the Proton family which were on display.

He was also drawn to the national motorcycle, the Modenas Kriss 110. The new Lotus Elise was also on display.

Saleh later said production of the national car and motor cycle would be stepped up to meet the demand from South Africa.

"In the case of Modenas, the CBU (completely built-up) is a bit hefty in South Africa because of the duty structure but we will still be looking at its export to the country."

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