

28 FEB 1997

Mandela-Visit

S. AFRICA, MALAYSIA TO SIGN MORE PACTS TO BOOST ECONOMIC TIES

By E.Sivabalan

KUALA LUMPUR, Feb 28 (Bernama) -- South Africa and Malaysia will sign a number of agreements during President Nelson Mandela's five-day visit to Malaysia next week, aimed at strengthening bilateral ties and economic cooperation.

South African High Commissioner Maite E.Mohale however declined to say what the pacts would be but it was understood that tourism and air travel would be among them.

Describing the visit from March 6-10 as long-overdue, she said it would be Mandela's first visit to Malaysia since becoming the republic's head of state. Apart from Malaysia, Mandela will also visit Singapore, the Philippines and Brunei.

He was originally scheduled to come here last October, but the trip was postponed following a minor knee surgery. Mandela made two trips to Malaysia in 1993, a year before the all-party South African election on April 27, 1994.

Mandela, 78, underwent surgery last September to repair damage to his knee suffered during his 27 years in prison on charges of trying to overthrow the country's former white government. He was released from prison in 1990.

Mohale said Mandela would be accompanied by a 90-member trade and senior officials delegation, including two ministers.

"Certainly, President Mandela is not coming to Malaysia to normalise relations but to strengthen the long-standing, friendly and warm relationship," she told Bernama in an interview here today.

Mohale said although there still exists a number of outstanding issues that needed to be ironed out such as the double taxation agreement and the republic's corporate tax structure, she said the "friendly line of communication" between the two countries had allowed for these matters to be settled amicably.

Besides holding talks with Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad, Mandela is scheduled to address a forum at the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Relations here.

Total trade between Malaysia and South Africa amounted to RM883 million in 1995 with South African exports to Malaysia almost doubling to RM388 million.

Malaysia established diplomatic relations with South Africa in November 1993 after the dismantling of apartheid and had been supportive of the national unity government of Mandela.

Dr Mahathir and Mandela have forged close personal ties. The Prime Minister made an unofficial stop-over in South Africa in 1992 and his first official visit was in August 1995.

Mohale said during his visit here, Mandela would highlight areas or potentials in South Africa that could be tapped by Malaysian investors such as in property development, privatisation and corporatisation projects and tourism.

On property development, she said investors could build more five-star hotels which are needed following the upsurge of tourist arrivals to the republic in the last few years.

Low-cost housing was also one area where foreign help was needed, she said.

Mohale said her government had also embarked on plans to privatise a

number of state-owned assets and companies.

On education, she said the South African government hoped to have an understanding with Mara to enable Malaysians students to persue their studies in the republic in certain fields like medicine. --BERNAMA

ES AAM