

South Africa seeks help to build economy

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PUTRAJAYA: South Africa has asked Malaysia for more investments and assistance to help build its economy and human resources.

The request was made by South African President Thabo Mbeki when he met Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad here yesterday, Foreign Minister Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar said after the meeting.

Syed Hamid said that Mbeki was happy with the bilateral relations between the two countries, describing Malaysia as an old and loyal friend.

"He told Dr Mahathir that South Africa has learnt a lot from Malaysia for developing its economy and restructuring its society, especially in providing opportunities for indigenous Africans.

"South Africa feels Malaysia is a model for development and assures that there will be continued political stability in the country," he said.

Malaysia is the third largest investor in South Africa, with investments in the telecommunications, oil and gas and hospitality sectors.

Mbeki arrived in Malaysia on Monday for a three-day visit.

Syed Hamid said Malaysia had no problem with Pretoria's policies for investors and was willing to share its experiences.

Malaysia asked for the South African Airline to fly to Kuala Lumpur. Malaysia Airlines flies to South Africa.

"The Transport Ministers will follow up on the possibility of code-sharing between the two airlines to enable more people to travel," Syed Hamid added.

He said the two leaders also agreed on the need for South-South countries to work together on the World Trade Organisation talks in Doha, Qatar to protect their interests.

Mbeki and Dr Mahathir witnessed the signing of a science and technology co-operation agreement and a memorandum of understanding to set up a joint commission.

South Africa expressed its interest in co-operating with the Southeast Asia Centre for Counter Terrorism in having joint training programmes.

An MoU was signed yesterday between Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia

(AIM), which spearheads poverty reduction in Malaysia, Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) and South African-based Women Development Banking Trust and Women Development Banking Micro Finance.

The MoU aims to enhance the transfer of expertise to develop the existing micro-credit concept in South Africa.

AIM was represented by its chairman Amihamzah Ahmad while Prof Daruk Dzulkipli Abdul Razak signed on behalf of USM.

The Prime Minister's wife Datin Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali witnessed the signing ceremony.

South African First Lady Zanele Mbeki and South African Deputy Finance Minister Mandisi Mphahlele signed on behalf of their agencies.

In her keynote address, Lady Zanele said Malaysia's model of the micro-credit system was liberating thousands of women from grinding poverty.