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South African links

PRESIDENT Thabo Mbeki of South Africa has reiterated his belief that the Non-Aligned Movement continues to have great relevance. As he pointed out, NAM must continue to emphasise multi-lateralism and multi-lateral institutions, and "to insist that countries should not, because they are strong and powerful, just act unilaterally any way they like." It is a point of view shared by Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad. Given his well-known views on globalisation, he can be expected to make sure NAM continues to serve as a bulwark against unilateral tendencies in international affairs.

The succession of Dr Mahathir to the NAM chair held by Mbeki is a coincidental reminder of the links between the two countries. Malaysia was an outspoken critic of apartheid in South Africa - indeed this was one of its first post-independence foreign policy positions - and a staunch supporter of the African National Congress. In promoting South-South co-operation, Malaysia has become the second-largest investor in South Africa.

Mbeki has been inevitably but unfairly compared with the charismatic Nelson Mandela, South Africa's first popularly elected president, whose heroism helped bring down white rule in 1994. It is Mbeki's task, however, to turn the ANC from a party of protest to one of government. So far, as a leader of his reconciled country and a regional power in the often hapless continent of Africa, he has been doing rather well.

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