

Mbeki promises UNSC support



Dr APJ Abdul Kalam and South Africa President Thabo Mbeki arrive for the opening of the Pan-African Parliament in Johannesburg on Friday. — AFP

nuclear weapons programme, there is pressure to do so — an African country could be one of them. If the UNSC is expanded — South Africa could be one of the

Srinjoy Chowdhury
in Durban

Sept. 17. — A presidential visit is usually about atmospherics and confidence-building, but Dr APJ Abdul Kalam's meetings with his counterpart, Mr T Mbeki, have ensured full South African support for India's bid for a permanent United Nations Security Council seat.

The declaration came during the South African president's banquet speech in Cape Town. This is being seen as a major victory, a substantial "positive" from the generally successful visit. South Africa is the strongest African nation — its economy being larger than the ones of Nigeria and Kenya combined — with the relevant stature, internationally. First, there is the allure of Mr Nelson Mandela and the defeat of apartheid and secondly, its participation in international "good works". It is also remembered as the country that voluntarily gave up its

frontrunners for that seat, considering everything. If that is so, India could support South Africa's candidature.

Besides his meeting with Mr Mandela, Dr Kalam's speech at the Pan African Parliament was telecast live in the entire continent, considered a major diplomatic triumph. Before that, of course, came Mr Mbeki's invitation to address the Parliament. There is the potential of building strong relationships with other African countries and there are over 50 of them. It would not require much effort — many African governments feel more comfortable with India, rather than Western countries. Most of them, it must be remembered, had colonies in the continent.

Dr Kalam's meeting with Mr

Mandela was slightly overshadowed by another meeting the latter had the same day, with Hollywood star Will Smith, an African-American.

On the sidelines, some important meetings were held. Among those who were part of Dr Kalam's delegation was Dr S Pillai, the rocketry head at the Defence Research and Development Organisation. As it is, there is talk of joint development and production, and Denel, despite some difficulties reported in local papers, is about to bag a major contract for 155mm self-propelled guns. It is also in the race for an even bigger order along with Bofors, for towed artillery guns.

Britain to back India: Britain today said it would back India's efforts to gain a permanent membership in the UNSC. The issue is expected to come up during Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh's talks with his British counterpart Mr Tony Blair next week, reports PTI from Thiruvananthapuram.

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India-Tanzania task force on economic tie-ups soon

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By Vinay Kumar

DAR-ES-SALAAM, SEPT. 12. Continuing India's "Focus Africa" policy, the President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, today took the initiative to form a "lean and mean" task force between India and Tanzania for identifying projects that could be funded from India's \$200-million line of credit New Economic Partnership for African Development (NEPAD).

Mr. Kalam's initiative came at a one-on-one meeting with the Tanzanian President, Benjamin William Mkapa, here last night. The meeting was followed by

delegation-level talks between the two countries, the Secretary (West), Shashi U. Tripathi, told the media today.

She said the proposed task force would soon take shape when the Ministry of External Affairs begins the exercise to concretise it. Tanzania has already accepted the suggestion of setting up the task force that would facilitate identifying the projects from Africa expeditiously. As of now only a \$40-million railway line project in Congo is being financed from NEPAD.

During the meeting with his

Tanzanian counterpart, Mr. Kalam was briefed in detail about the security situation in Tanzania which is facing a rather huge influx of refugees from Rwanda and Burundi which now touches close to half a million mark. Playing a mediatory role for restoration of peace and stability in its neighbourhood that is riven by civil strife, Tanzania also faces a drain on its economy due to the problem of refugees.

This is Mr. Kalam's second visit abroad since assuming office two years ago. His first visit too was to Africa; he visited Su-

dan last October. At the delegation-level talks, three key sectors for increased cooperation — healthcare, agriculture and education — were identified. Mr. Kalam stressed India's continued efforts to partner Tanzania in these sectors.

He suggested that the existing 75 seats for Tanzanian students in Indian technical and educational institutions be increased. It was also agreed to request the university in Dar-es-Salaam to identify and cooperate with one Indian university in sending students to India for advanced studies.

Strengthening ties with S Africa

IN the midst of our own general elections, it is of more than ordinary interest to take a look at another successful recent election in a developing country, South Africa. In both places, democracy has taken root despite what appeared to be highly unfavourable conditions: in India the burden of poverty and illiteracy, in South Africa the affliction of apartheid. Yet, neither has faltered and if today India is further along the road, it may be that South Africa has overcome the more explosive problem. What each of them has achieved is not to be taken for granted, witness the very different experience of their neighbours Pakistan and Zimbabwe. India and S Africa were able to build on the legacy of a robust national liberation struggle. The Congress Party in India and the African National Congress in South Africa led the struggle, and from within their ranks emerged towering leaders who were well able to take command and guide their respective nations in the critical early years.

The S African elections, conducted to high standards, have resulted in an increased majority for the ruling ANC. Its share of the vote is as much as 69.7 per cent. Indeed, in each successive election – this is the third – the ANC share has gone up. Just as significant is the fact that opposition parties that base themselves on narrow racial or tribal support, like the Democratic Alliance (mainly 'white') and the Inkatha Freedom Party (mainly Zulu), have lost ground. Inkatha, which seeks to mobilise the country's largest tribal group and was once seen as a potent challenger to the ANC, is no longer in a position to form a government in its home province of KwaZulu Natal. The message that seems to come through is that with democracy, pluralism triumphs and the politics of moderation holds sway.

Electoral victory will further enhance the personal standing of

President Thabo Mbeki. He came to the presidency in succession to the heroic Nelson Mandela, having served earlier as the great man's deputy. Mbeki spent much of his earlier life in the UK as a student and ANC activist, returning home after the ban on the party was lifted in 1990. He plunged into transition politics, in the process moderating some of the more radical views he had held earlier. When Mandela left office, Mbeki was the successor chosen by the ANC executive. He has enjoyed a vast majority in Parliament, yet is no authoritarian. He is known to be a reconciler and negotiator, an intellectual who has absorbed much from the liberal intellectual milieu of his early days in the UK. There are obvious similarities with an earlier generation of anti-colonial leaders, including Nehru. Like Nehru, Mbeki is known for a detached,

wide angle

SALMAN HAIDAR

almost withdrawn personal style, while being responsive to the masses and they to him. He has also had the good fortune of receiving the guidance of Nelson Mandela who has been there to lend some of his lustre and moral authority to those who succeeded him in office.

The institutional and personal parallels only emphasise the fact that India and S Africa have much in common. These are multi-racial, multi-religious societies with similar political ideals and structures. A strong Indian community in South Africa provides a special link between them. There are contrasts, too: for one, S Africa has highly developed transport and communications infrastructure that makes India look old fashioned, and its vast mineral wealth has no parallel anywhere. Within their respective regions, each

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tends to overshadow the smaller countries around and to assume the central role in the regional economic organisation, be it Saarc or SADC. Both also aspire to permanent membership of the UN Security Council, S Africa backing India while being itself more circumspect, for an African candidate is yet to emerge.

But for all that binds them, the two nations have not developed the level of relationship that should be within their grasp. India led the world in supporting the S African cause at the UN but during the crucial period of transition when the apartheid regime finally crumbled, India was not fully on the scene. At that time South Africa was going through a process very similar to India's in 1947, an orderly handover of authority rather than a revolutionary overthrow. We were in a position to share much from our own experience but did less than we might have. Then, in the first flush of the new South Africa, we seemed more preoccupied with the legacy of the past than with the prospects for the future, with our icon Gandhiji and his special link with South Africa rather than new regional projects.

The scope for a richer relationship still exists. The recent initiative for special links between India, Brazil and S Africa may get somewhere. Tourism is growing as more and more Indians set out to discover the world. In an earlier era, we had droves of Indian businessmen visiting S Africa with very meagre results but business exchanges could become more active now that a new preferential trading agreement is under negotiation. Such imaginative measures are needed to serve the abiding interests of the two nations, for there can be no further freewheeling on the goodwill of the past.

(Salman Haidar is a former Foreign Secretary, Government of India.)

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India pledges \$500m to West African nations

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By Our Diplomatic Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 1. India today pledged \$500 million in the form of concessional credit facilities to eight west African countries — Burkina Faso, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Equatorial Guinea, Ghana, Guinea Bissau, Mali and Senegal — who, together with India, form TEAM-9 or Techno-Economic Approach for Africa-India Movement.

TEAM-9 Ministers, who signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU), agreed that a Heads of State/Government meeting would be held regularly.

The MoU also set up a Council of Ministers comprising Foreign Ministers or any other

Minister, as well as a Joint Business Council under the new regional cooperation mechanism.

"It was decided that the TEAM-9 cooperation mechanism will operate at Government, institutional and private sector levels, sharing various types of expertise, intellectual and physical resources as well as economic opportunities for promoting welfare, growth and prosperity of the people," a joint statement issued after the meeting said.

Stressing that transfer of technologies was envisaged under the TEAM-9 mechanism, the statement spoke of specific projects in areas such as agriculture, small-scale industries, rural development, pharmaceuticals, telecommunications and energy.

According to the MoU, the new regional cooperation mechanism was being created "recognising" the crucial role that South-South cooperation can play in this era of globalisation, liberalisation and privatisation.

In remarks to the press, the External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, said after the meeting: "We have talked about food security and freedom from hunger, which will mean cooperation in agriculture and water management."

Denying that India looked to African countries in terms of votes at the United Nations, Mr. Sinha said: "As far as political issues are concerned, we have not discussed them here today. We will let that evolve as we go along."