

# 'IORC meant to complement existing groupings'

By OUR REPORTERS

THE South African-proposed Indian Ocean Rim Cooperation (IORC) should not be seen as a threat to existing groupings and forums like the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (Apec) as it will not become another trade bloc.

South African Deputy President F.W. de Klerk said the IORC will complement existing groupings and bring respective nations closer to mutual understanding.

Speaking to a roomful of ministers, deputy ministers, members of the diplomatic corps and corporate leaders in Kuala Lumpur yesterday, he said no country or trade

organisation should be alarmed as it was "only a proposal".

At a press conference later, he said South Africa is considering the possibility of setting up the IORC as it is "an idea worth pursuing."

"It will be a mechanism for mutual development... it is not going to become another trade bloc like Apec or Nafta. Therefore, it must not be seen as a threat," he added.

During a question and answer session after presenting a talk on "The negotiations, the election and the first five years of the New South Africa" at the Institute of Diplomacy and Foreign Affairs yesterday, he said:

"There is room and space for all the various cooperations and we should explore and utilise this for maximum benefit.

"A great deal can be done to improve the interaction of the countries of the Indian Ocean rim without creating new trade blocs to negative-

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ly affect existing regional groupings.

"The countries that border the Indian Ocean include almost one third of the total world population and comprise major and emerging economies like Australia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, India, the Gulf states and South Africa," he said.

He stressed that the countries of the Indian Ocean present a vast potential that has yet to be fully tapped.

De Klerk also outlined the Government's plans to promote South Africa as an attractive destination for both tourists and investors.

In responding to a question from Tan Sri Ramon Navaratnam on how the country intends to overcome budgetary problems to ensure protection of foreign investments, he said the South African Government is well aware of the need for an investor friendly and market-oriented climate.

"We will look at all the programmes under the budget and will reduce the size

of the civil service and privatize as much as possible in our effort to create funds for the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP).

"The RDP is the centrepiece policy of the Government of National Unity in Africa and envisages a broad interlocking programme which aims to address the total spectrum of socio-economic challenges. This includes the creation of jobs, the provision of housing, primary health care, water, electricity and improved education," he said.

He added that the Government also hopes to reduce

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the deficit in the near future, as part of the measures to reduce escalating debts.

One of the Government's main strategies in generating more funds is by the liquidating state-owned assets.

"By doing this, we will not only be assured of reducing the Government's debt but will also be able to invest in

facilities under the RDP."

He added that South Africa can play a constructive role in the global interaction between the first and third worlds.

"We face the challenge within our own country of bridging the gaps between the developed and developing communities. A shrinking world will have to grapple tomorrow with the many problems that confront South Africa today," he said.

De Klerk also stressed the importance of Malaysia realising the importance of ties between the two countries as his country can serve as the gateway to southern Africa as well as the sub-Saharan region, while Malaysia can help South Africa penetrate South-East Asia.

"Many foreign companies are now establishing their bases in South Africa with a view to penetrating the markets in the north," he said.