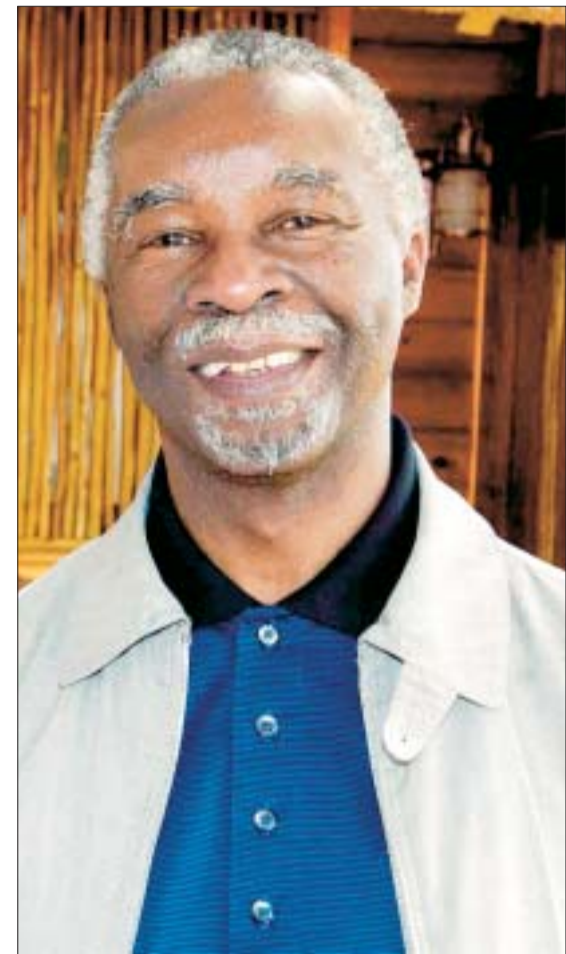


# HAPPY 65TH BIRTHDAY, MR PRESIDENT!

Co-ordinated by: Special Projects,  
Independent Newspapers Cape – 021 488 4175

## Thabo Mbeki: 'I am an African'



**Carole Knight**  
Author: *Miracles of Hope: Surviving and Thriving in the 21st Century*

SOUTH Africa's strategic position at the foot of the African continent has contributed enormously to its enviable position not only as the gateway to Africa, but more recently, as the powerhouse of this vast and resource-rich continent. Much that is of value to the world at large has come out of this land, so it was with considerable interest that global players watched the political landscape of South Africa shift and change with the advent of the Government of National Unity. At home, many South Africans held their breath as the new leaders of the fledgling democracy had yet to be assessed and gauged.

Despite having been a key figure in the negotiating team at Codesa (Convention for a Democratic South Africa), the groundbreaking peace talks begun at the World Trade Centre in Johannesburg in the summer of 1991, first Deputy President Thabo Mbeki was an enigma for many South Africans when Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as the first president of a democratic South Africa on May 10, 1994.

As a leading exile and favoured protégé of ANC stalwart, Oliver Tambo, Mbeki had lived away from South Africa for 28 years and as such was somewhat of an unknown quantity, with his preference for working quietly behind the scenes in small groups adding to his inscrutability. Many in South Africa and much of the world had yet to take the measure of the man destined to succeed Mandela and lead this country through what has effectively been, and continues to be, one of its most challenging hours.

**'I was born into the struggle'**

As a consummate strategist, Mbeki's high visibility on the international stage has also helped to broadly focus world attention on Africa, attempting in terms of his participation in NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development), to dispel widespread Afro-pessimism with the representation of this continent's interests in a reasonable and reassuring manner.

As the son of Govan Mbeki, one of the Rivonia trialists, he has impeccable political credentials and an impressive cachet conferred on him by his father. However, it is his own lifelong involvement with the ANC, succinctly summarised by his statement, "I was born into the struggle", as well as his undeniable organisational ability and diplomatic flair, that propelled him through the ranks of the movement's cadres to the most powerful position in the land.

**'Tomorrow belongs to us'**

Throughout his teens, Mbeki was involved in black student politics, with his matric year being cut short due to his expulsion from Lovedale College, a well-known Methodist missionary school in Alice that Nelson Mandela also attended, because he helped to organise a student boycott. The sudden end to his formal schooling prompted a move to Johannesburg where he was taken under the wing of Walter Sisulu and Duma Nokwe, completing his British A-levels through correspondence.

During this time, he was elected secretary of the African Students' Association (ASA), his first official leadership position, which led him to being detained for six weeks for his involvement in organising protests against Bantu education, as it was known at the time.

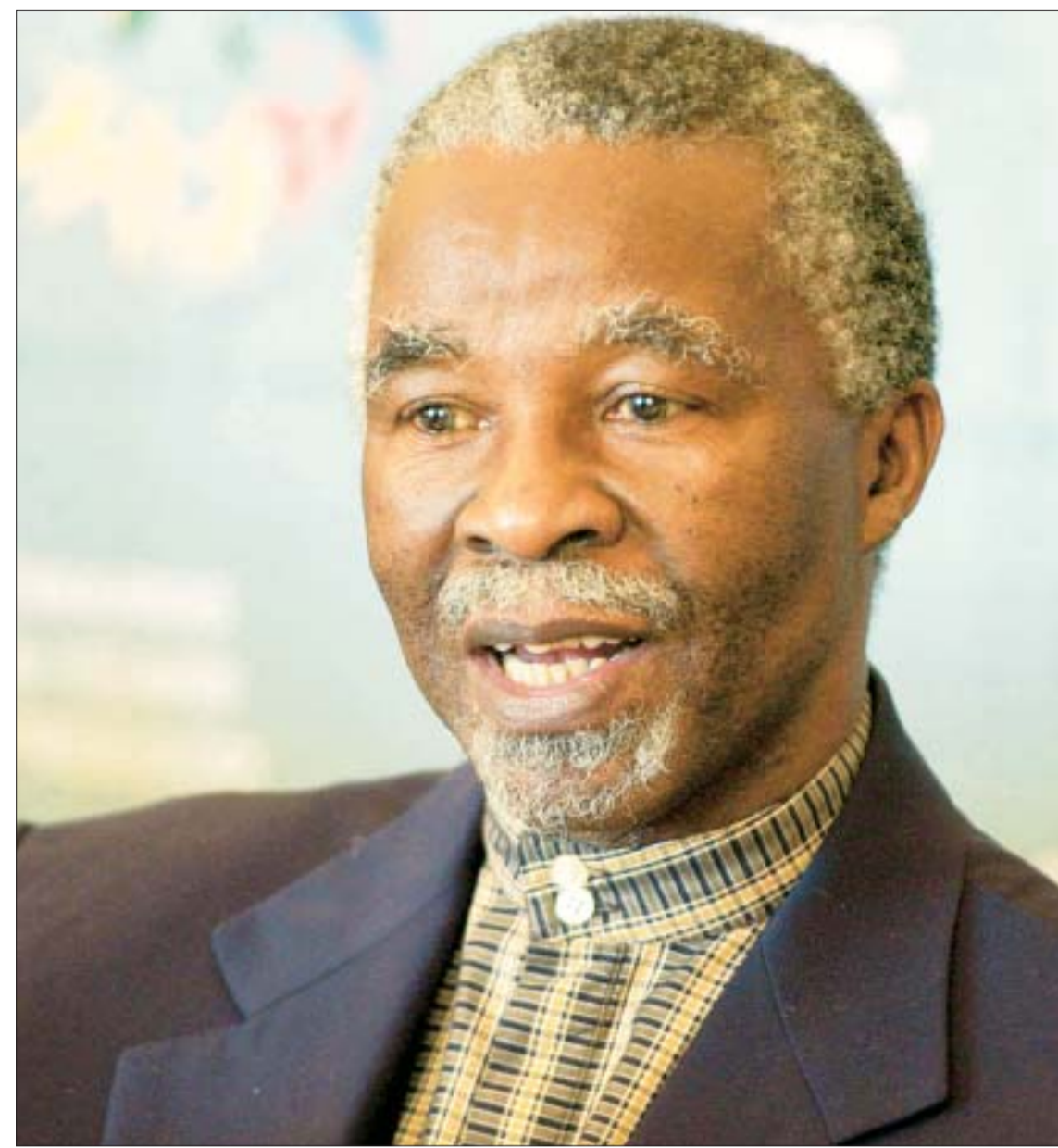
With political movements coming under increasingly severe attack from the State, Mbeki left South Africa in 1962 under orders from the ANC, moving from Zimbabwe to Tanzania and then to Britain.

The 1960s in Britain was a heady time of student radicalism, anti-Vietnam protests, "Ban the Bomb" slogans, existentialism, pop art, miniskirts and beads and, like many students at the University of Sussex where Mbeki studied for a Master's degree in economics, his politics were aligned to the orthodox left.

However, it was during this time, as the only black student in his year, that he began to outwardly manifest his propensity for independent thought as he adopted a distinctive personal style, modelling himself along the lines of an English intellectual and favouring tweed cloth caps and a pipe at a time when most young men went about in T-shirts and jeans or military fatigues.

Mbeki's student years were busy and active as he played a prominent role in mobilising the international student community against apartheid. During this time, on a personal level, he led an active social life, with his closest friends being brothers Essop and Aziz Pahad, friendships that have continued to this day.

Many university friends from the period remember him as having a gentle and calm manner, with one friend in



**DEEP THINKER:** President Mbeki's trademark style is that of a quiet, but charming intellectual, who enjoys Bay Rum tobacco and quoting Shakespeare.

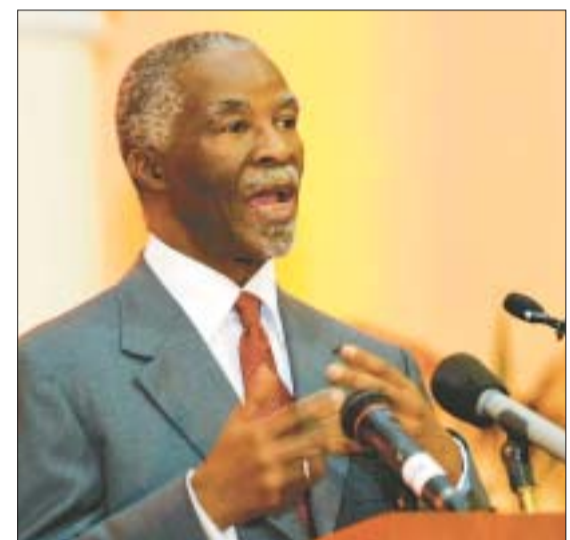
particular remembering his "chameleon-like" ability to straddle different worlds.

After the completion of his studies, Thabo Mbeki went to work at the ANC's London office, the most powerful ANC office in exile, however, military training in the Soviet Union was mandatory for someone who had been earmarked by the movement as a future leader, and Thabo Mbeki was no exception to this rule.

After this obligatory period of military training in the Soviet Union, with his appointment in Lusaka as assistant secretary of the Revolutionary Council of the ANC, a body that was responsible for the overthrow of the apartheid government, he was ready to begin the next important phase of his life – an apprenticeship that would eventually take him to the highest position in the country.

**'No diplomacy is loud'**

With his aspiration for an economic, spiritual, social, cultural, moral and political renewal as his driving imperative, once in office as an elected president of South Africa, Mbeki used the financially austere, but market-friendly GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution) policy to



bring about fiscal reform, achieving a level of macroeconomic stability not seen in this country for more than 40 years. Regarded as "pro-business", he has tried hard to engender an investor-friendly environment and while foreign investment expectations have not yet been realised, there is record domestic economic growth.

Mbeki's quiet brand of African diplomacy, learnt from his mentor Oliver Tambo during the tough exile years, has enhanced South Africa's prestige internationally to the extent that it has opened the way for the 2010 Fifa World Cup to be held in this country.

In less than a decade, he has transformed the social structure of South Africa with the emergence of a black elite class and a strongly emerging black middle-class, and through his regular "Letter from the President", a personal blog that charts his day-to-day impressions, travels and activities, he has transformed governmental communication, putting a more accessible face on the ANC and the presidency.

Mbeki's tenure on the centre-stage of South African politics has left an indelible mark on this country. His legacy has included deep entrenchment of one of the most progressive Constitutions and Bills of Rights in the world.

The country's identity has been re-engineered to embrace diversity as a cornerstone precept. There has been a new wave of urbanisation, modernisation, innovation and commoditisation, underpinned by a Proudly South African ethos.

And in terms of globalisation, South Africa's entry into the hyper-competitive global environment has compelled the maximisation of comparative advantage and provided important benefits, such as market access and economies of scale, to a rapidly expanding entrepreneurial sector.

Believing unequivocally in the principle of African solutions for African problems and abhorring the begging bowl, Mbeki has focused effort on the establishment of a free trade zone that will hopefully one day run the full length of the African continent from Cape to Cairo, creating opportunity by using Africa's own initiatives and entrepreneurship together with capital from increased exports and additional investments, objectives that will go a long way to helping to meet the ambitious goals for Africa adopted at the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in September 2000.

The establishment of a free trade zone will give specifically SADC (Southern African Development Community) greater bargaining power when talking to the European Union (EU), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Japan and China. He has also invested considerable time, effort, resources and money in brokering peace between dissenting African leaders in the belief that in order for the African Renaissance to move beyond rhetoric to substance, a foundation of good governance needs to be laid down on the continent.

Thabo Mbeki has come a long way from the days when he was a "homeless Londoner" carrying all his worldly belongings around with him in a suitcase, as his life-long friend and best man at his wedding, Essop Pahad, has described him during a period of his political apprenticeship in Britain. Happily, for some of the ride, he has taken us with him. Happy birthday, President Mbeki and may you have many, many more!

*References:*  
■ Anthony Sampson, *Mandela: The Authorised Biography*, Jonathan Ball Publishers  
■ William Mervin Gumede, *Thabo Mbeki and the Battle for the Soul of the ANC*, Zebra Press  
■ John Allen, *Rabble-Rouser for Peace*, Random House.

*"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy"*

- Martin Luther King Jr.

### UASA – The Union

salutes and congratulates our President Mr Thabo Mbeki on the occasion of his 65th Birthday



www.uasa.org.za  
011 472 3600



**E SETA**  
Energy Sector Education and Training Authority

**LONG LIVE MR PRESIDENT!**

ESETA salutes your contribution in ensuring wider access to **Energy and Water**.

*"the facilitator of world-class skills for Energy and Water"*



**PetroSA**

Vision: To become the leading African energy company

*PetroSA wishes President Thabo Mbeki a wonderful birthday*

PetroSA owns, operates and manages the South African Government's commercial assets in the petroleum industry. The corporation aspires to become a leading African Energy company. The core business of PetroSA is explorations and production of oil and natural gas, manufacturing of synthetic fuel, crude oil storage and marketing of products.



**nelson mandela bay MUNICIPALITY**  
PORT ELIZABETH | UITENHAGE | DESPATCH

**"A globally competitive city that works together with the people"**

**Happy Birthday Mr President**

from Executive Mayor Cllr Nondumiso Maphazi