

Gandhi Peace Prize for Desmond Tutu

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ARCHBISHOP DESMOND Tutu has been awarded the Gandhi Peace Prize for 2005 in recognition of his "invaluable contribution towards social and political transformation through dialogue and tolerance", Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced on Monday towards the end of a three-day visit to South Africa.

Tutu, who will turn 75 on October 7, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 for his work against apartheid. He coined the term Rainbow Nation to describe a post-apartheid South Africa.

Speaking at the inauguration of a permanent exhibition titled "M.K. Gandhi: Prisoner of Conscience" at the Old Fort on Johannesburg's Constitution Hill where Mohandas Gandhi had once been imprisoned, the prime minister noted that Monday was the 137th birth anniversary of the Mahatma. He said Gandhi would have been elated to see the transformation post-apartheid South Africa has gone through under the leadership of Madiba, the name by which Nelson Mandela is widely known and loved.

A short while later the prime minister met Mandela in a brief but emotional encounter at the offices of the Nelson Mandela Foundation in Johannesburg. Mandela then walked Singh to the door and introduced him to the visual media recording the event by saying: "There are so many Singhs both in India and here and I thought I should come and introduce him to you." He said Indians had had a major influence on South African history, especially Mahatma Gandhi. "The Indians influenced our struggle a great deal," he said.



Manmohan Singh told Mandela: "For us in India you are a living legend, the greatest Gandhian of our age... You have transformed the lives of millions and millions of people."

Noting that this year was the centenary of the principle of satyagraha that the Mahatma had formulated as a young lawyer in South Africa, the prime minister told the audience at the Old Fort earlier that satyagraha had "contributed to India's freedom, influenced many liberation struggles in Africa, gave inspiration to the American civil rights movement."

He asked pointedly: "But the question is sometimes asked -- are the Mahatma and the practice of satyagraha relevant today?"

He said the answer came five years on September 11, 2001, on the anniversary of satyagraha when the United States was attacked. "September 11 therefore now symbolises a choice that the world has to make," he said. "Which is the path we should take -- the path of a peaceful struggle or the path of a brutal violence that targets innocents?"

He said Gandhi had summed up the answer eloquently: "An eye for an eye will make the whole world blind."