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China ruling party leaders pass historic Xi resolution



OSLO: In this file photo taken on December 9, 1993 Nelson Mandela, President of South African National Congress (C) and South African President Frederik de Klerk (R) display in Oslo their Nobel Prizes after being awarded jointly for their work to end apartheid peacefully. FW de Klerk, South Africa's last white president, has died aged 85, his foundation announced yesterday. — AFP

S Africa's last white president dies

De Klerk, aged 85, died after a battle with cancer

JOHANNESBURG: FW de Klerk, South Africa's last white president, dismantled the apartheid regime that brought him to power when he freed Nelson Mandela from prison and negotiated a path to democracy. He shared the Nobel Peace Prize with Mandela in 1993 for leading the "miracle" transition from white rule.

But as the new democracy matured, many inside the country came to see him as a symbol for the failure of white South Africa to acknowledge the full horrors of apartheid and to bring perpetrators to justice. De Klerk, aged 85, died yesterday after a battle with cancer, his foundation said in a statement.

"It is with the deepest sadness that the FW de Klerk Foundation must announce that former president FW de Klerk died peacefully at his home in Fresnaye earlier this morning following his struggle against mesothelioma cancer," it said.

"Mr De Klerk was 85 years old. He is survived by his wife Elita, his children Jan and Susan, and his grandchildren." De Klerk ensured his place in history when on February

2, 1990, he announced Mandela's release from 27 years in jail and lifted the ban on black liberation movements, effectively declaring the death of white-minority rule.

"I would hope that history will recognise that I, together with all those who supported me, have shown courage, integrity, honesty at the moment of truth in our history. That we took the right turn," De Klerk said. Twenty years after that speech, De Klerk said freeing Mandela had "prevented a catastrophe".

Frederik Willem de Klerk was born in Johannesburg on March 18, 1936. His father, Jan de Klerk, was a minister in the National Party (NP) government that instituted apartheid. His uncle, JG Strijdom, was a prime minister notorious for stripping mixed race people of voting rights.

De Klerk followed in their footsteps. After practising law for 11 years, he won a seat in parliament for the NP in 1972 and climbed the political ladder through cabinet until he became the party's leader in February 1989.

Just six months later, after PW Botha was forced to resign, De Klerk became president of

South Africa. "When he became head of the National Party, he seemed to be the quintessential party man, nothing more and nothing less," Mandela wrote of him. "Nothing in his past seemed to hint at a spirit of reform."

Negotiated end to apartheid

Yet Mandela sensed an opening and sent him a letter outlining a negotiated end to apartheid. Less than two months later, De Klerk announced Mandela's unconditional release and the end of the ban on the African National Congress. De Klerk helped negotiate a new constitution, transforming South Africa into a non-racial democracy. He served for two years as Mandela's deputy.

Despite relinquishing power and ushering in democracy, De Klerk never moulded to the new South Africa. He appeared before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, apologising for apartheid. He also stormed out and accused the panel of bias.

As Mandela became a global icon, De Klerk in a 2012 speech insisted: "He was by no means the avuncular and saint-like figure so widely

depicted today." In his later years, De Klerk called on the ANC government to take accountability for rampant poverty and joblessness. But he would bristle at efforts to hold him accountable, and never accepted responsibility for the torture, rapes, and killings committed by the whites-only government. He tried to make excuses for apartheid's network of "bantustans", intended to confine black South Africans to supposed ethnic homelands.

And in 2020, he sparked a national furore by refusing to call apartheid a crime against humanity. He always backtracked, especially if the scandals rippled into international headlines. But even when he found the right words, he was never able to strike the right tone in modern South Africa. For all he gave the country, what he couldn't give was a sense of remorse.

De Klerk and his first wife, Marike, who married in April 1958, had three adopted children. The couple divorced in 1998 after he admitted to an affair with Elita Georgiades, the wife of a Greek shipping tycoon. De Klerk and Georgiades married the same year. — AFP