



ON THE RIGHT TRACK... Rajmohan Gandhi, who is on a visit to South Africa

Picture: AMBROSE PETERS

By ANDREW BEATTIE

SOUTH AFRICA'S transition to democracy was the "most crucial and decisive event in the world today", Professor Rajmohan Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, said during a visit to Cape Town this week.

Mr Gandhi is a research scholar, columnist and author and former general secretary of the Janata Dal Party, one of the main parties in India.

He is visiting South Africa 100 years after his grandfather, who eventually spent 21 years in Natal.

"My grandfather found his purpose in life here," Professor Gandhi said.

"If he were alive today, in my view, he would ask every South African to become South African, to preserve his or her specific culture and to take on board the histories and the pains of all the other peoples who live beside him or her,

"All the streams must come together to form one stream," he said.

Only by building a common New South African identity could the wounds of the past be healed.

Professor Gandhi said he had met people from across the political spec-

Gandhi's grandson visits SA

trum here and that 60 to 70 percent had faith in the future and the practical imperatives of living together.

India and South Africa "could learn from each other's mistakes if not from our achievements, there are a great deal of similarities".

He said he had no doubt that "one person one vote" had proved to be a success in India, and would succeed here too.

Professor Gandhi said his personal mission was to "communicate sanity".

"We need to arm the common people mentally and morally against the designs of divisive politicians who prey on anger and resentments. We must

never accept that the citizen is powerless. He has an instinctive sense of what is sound and this has to be fortified."

But Professor Gandhi said he believed it was a fallacy that South Africa could solve its problems of job creation and housing within the constraints of the market economy only.

"The best minds must come together to solve the economic problems of the millions who are suffering".

The "next great battle in South Africa will be between construction and demolition", but "those who have faith as well as cautious hope will be vindicated".

The success of democracy in South Africa would be a "amazing gift of pride and hope to the world, which has an important stake and interest in it".

South Africa was of immense importance to Indians as a foreign policy issue because of the common histories and the fact that Mahatma Gandhi spent so long here.

He said he had not visited South Africa before because of apartheid. "South Africans who have decided to undo apartheid made it possible for me to come here now."

The ending of apartheid was the "last great act of decolonisation, a process which began with the independence of India". It was a historical event which rivalled in importance the falling of the Berlin Wall and the end of communism, he said.

He said he expected India to resume full diplomatic links with South Africa "in the near future" now that the Transitional Executive Council (TEC) had been approved by Parliament.

● Air India will resume air links with South Africa on Saturday, October 2, the birthday of India's peace campaigner.