

Good news for tourism sector

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A DAY AFTER calls at Indaba 2009 for the tourism industry in South Africa to be taken more seriously came news that tourism will now be taken care of by a new stand-alone government department following the announcement of the new cabinet yesterday.

Marthinus van Schalkwyk retained the tourism portfolio while the environmental affairs division is now included under the new Department of Water and Environmental Affairs.

The move has been welcomed by the Tourism Business Council of South Africa and South African Tourism.

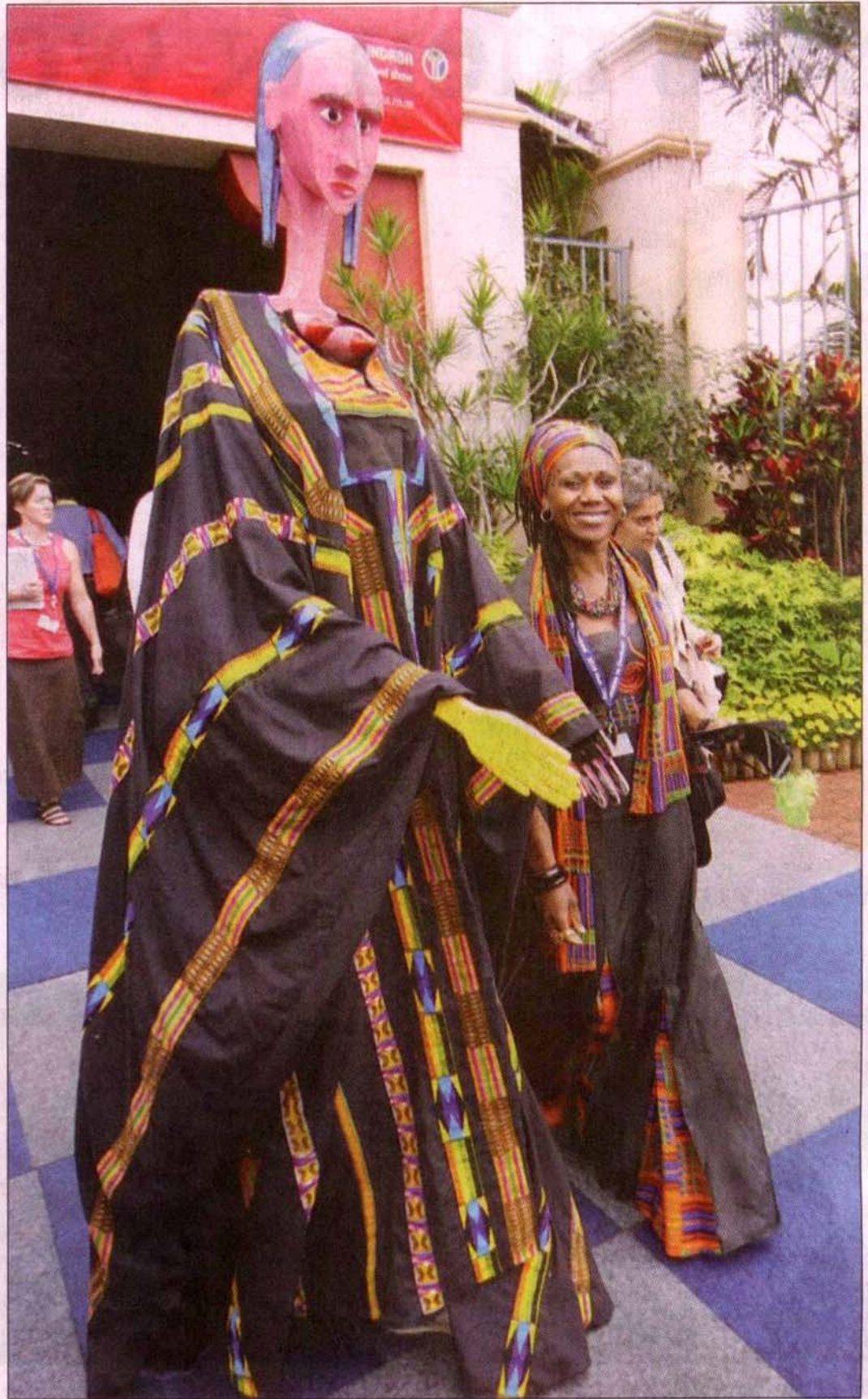
"This is what we have been asking for, for the tourism industry to be taken more seriously in the South African economy.

"This is a sure sign that we, as a key growth sector in the country, are going to be taken more seriously, with a single department focused on planning, monitoring and delivery," said council chief executive Mmatsatsi Marobe.

South African Tourism board chairman Jabu Mabuza said the government's decision to have a dedicated minister and department was recognition of the industry's importance to the economy.

"Tourism contributed more than 1 million jobs and an estimated R195 billion to the economy in 2008. With the recognition of the need for a dedicated ministry, we hope that additional resources will be invested in tourism because so much rides on this industry that has delivered, and will continue to deliver, significantly to our economy," he said.

There were strong calls for the industry to be taken more seriously at the launch of SA's first Tourism Satellite Account at Indaba - Africa's biggest tourism trade-show - in Durban on Saturday. The account is a comprehensively researched document containing tourism-



Mthoko Shize dressed up as 'Malia Gold', left, and Mwimbi Loew of Gold Restuarant in Cape Town stroll through the Indaba in Durban.

PICTURE: SHELLEY KJONSTAD

related information - including tourist arrival figures and employment growth in the sector - which will be used as a tool to lobby for support of the industry.

"For it to be taken more seriously in South Africa, we

needed a tool that measures the economic contribution of the tourism sector, and that is what the Tourism Satellite Account is all about. It is a tool internationally approved by the UN World Tourism Organisation, and now we are creating one

for South Africa," said Rashad Cassim of Statistics SA.

Economist Iraj Abedian said tourism had grown remarkably in recent years and had overtaken mining in its contribution to gross domestic product and employment.