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South Africa's Zuma sworn in as President

PRETORIA: Jacob Zuma was sworn in as South African president on Saturday after a remarkable political comeback, taking over a faltering economy plagued by crime, poverty and AIDS.

Former South African leader Nelson Mandela, considered a symbol of the anti-apartheid struggle, attended the presidential inauguration ceremony, in a huge political coup for Zuma.

Zuma, 67, taking the oath of office before heads of state was unthinkable during turbulent years when graft and rape charges nearly ruined him, crises that might have buried many politicians.

"This is a moment of renewal," Zuma said in his inauguration speech.

Air force jets flew over the presidential offices where Zuma will have to make tough decisions as he juggles the interests of union and communist allies who helped him rise to the top, and foreign investors who fear he will steer the economy left.

At the top of Zuma's agenda will be navigating Africa's biggest economy

through what could already be its first recession in 17 years.

The charismatic politician won a wide mandate to lead with a ruling African National Congress (ANC) landslide victory in the April 22 election.

South Africans respect the ANC for its long anti-apartheid struggle but they are growing impatient with a number of problems which Zuma has promised to tackle.

Investors are eager to see who forms his economic team and are especially interested in the fate of respected Finance Minister Trevor Manuel, praised for his fiscal management.

Stacking the government, to be named on Sunday, with loyalists could hurt the credibility of Zuma, who has said ANC officials should not expect positions just because of their loyalty.

Meanwhile, Jacob Zuma on Saturday vowed to follow Nelson Mandela's legacy of reconciliation in an inaugural speech.

"He made reconciliation the central theme of his term of office. We will not



Jacob Gedleyihlekisa Zuma (right) is sworn in as South Africa's fourth President since the end of apartheid by the country's Chief Justice, Pius Langa in Pretoria on May 9, 2009.

deviate from that nation building task. Thank you Madiba for showing us the way," Zuma said, affectionately referring to Mandela by his clan name.

"Madiba healed our wounds and established the Rainbow Nation very firmly. He set us on the path of nation building and prosperity and made us a respected member

of the world community of nations," Zuma said.

"He taught us that all South Africans have equal claim to this country and that there can be no lasting peace unless all of us, black and white, learned to live together in harmony and in peace." - AFP/Reuters