

Kenya looks to Malaysia as role model

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Nairobi realises that education is critical

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NAIROBI: Kenya, where half of the 35 million population live below the poverty line, is looking at Malaysia as a model to develop its human capital, infrastructure, agro-based technologies and global trade.

The east African country's Foreign Affairs Minister Raphael Tuju said Kenyans have a lot to learn from the Malaysian experience.

"We started out at the same level at the time of independence, with the same GDPs, levels of education and natural resources but Malaysia has overtaken Kenya and many other former British colonies," he said in an interview yesterday.

Tuju said Malaysia streaked ahead by putting priority on education right from the start.

"The focus was on compulsory literacy and numeracy. We have since learnt the hard way that a universal level of primary and secondary education is crucial for countries to be developed," he said.

Kenya only introduced free primary education in 2003. Enrolments rose from 5.9 million to 7.4 million a year later. The country expects transition to secondary education to rise by 70% next year.

The Kenyan Foreign Minister said Kenya was looking East for its development agenda after decades of lagging behind. He said Malaysia, South Korea and Thailand were the countries that it wanted to emulate.

Tuju noted the United States, Britain, Australia and India were still the country's traditional education destinations but Kenyans were warming to Malaysia as an alternative.

"Given the exchange mechanisms, it is cheaper for Kenyans and other Africans to study in Malaysia. The degrees obtained are



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also recognised globally," he added.

Tuju said Kenya was also seeking collaboration with Malaysia on appropriate new technologies, particularly those that were agro-based, designed to increase yields and shelf life of crops.

He said African nations, which used to rely heavily on European nations for the building of major infrastructure projects, have since recognised Malaysia's expertise and successes abroad in the sector.

"It's not rocket science anymore. We can work together on such projects because we have common cultures and backgrounds," he said.

On tourism, one of Kenya's major revenue earners, Tuju, who was former Tourism Minister said Malaysian businessmen should take advantage of investment opportunities available in Kenya, globally renowned for its wildlife reserves.