

MALAYSIA, KENYA SCRAP TARIFFS TO BOOST TRADE

Both countries commit to removing barriers, as well as deepening cooperation



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KENYA is courting Malaysia's economic lessons and views the country as a benchmark of transformation, which it hopes to emulate.

Kenyan President William Samoei Ruto said Malaysia's economic transformation had been at a level most African countries could only look up to in awe.

He said both countries began at a similar footing at independence, but Malaysia had since outgrown Kenya by leaps and bounds.

"Malaysia's journey continues to inspire us and proves that discipline, focus and bold leadership can transform a nation," Ruto said.

He said Malaysia was regularly cited by Kenyan politicians as a benchmark, as the country had now become an upper middle-income economy.

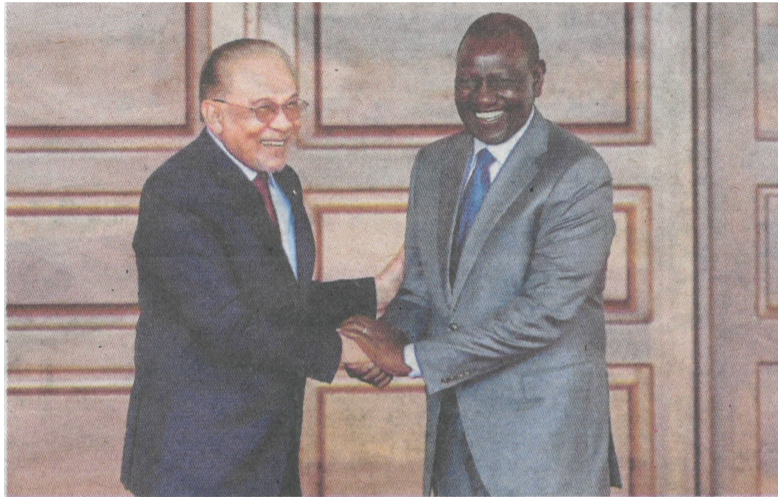
He was hosting a welcoming ceremony for Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim at the State House, the official residence of Kenya's president.

The two leaders earlier held a bilateral meeting and witnessed the exchange of memoranda of understanding and documents on cooperation in various sectors, including tourism.

There was also an exchange between Kuala Lumpur City Hall and the Nairobi City Council.

Anwar and Ruto said both countries had agreed that their bilateral relations should be upgraded to a strategic partnership.

Kenya is Malaysia's third-



Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim getting a warm welcome from Kenya President William Samoei Ruto at the State House in Nairobi yesterday. BERNAMA PIC

largest trading partner in Africa, with total trade reaching RM5.7 billion, a 1.2 per cent increase from RM5.51 billion in the preceding year.

Anwar's visit here is the first by a Malaysian prime minister in over two decades.

Ruto said his discussions with Anwar had reinforced the long-standing relations between the two nations. He said elevating the relationship of both countries would ensure that cooperation could advance with purpose and structure.

He said both countries had also reaffirmed their commitment to removing tariff and non-tariff barriers, expanding Kenyan exports to Malaysia, and deepening cooperation in digital technology and high-tech manufacturing.

He welcomed Malaysia's decision to remove tariffs on agricultural produce and beef.

He said this was a significant step that would open new market opportunities for Kenyan farmers and strengthen the commercial foundation of partnership between the two countries.

"The removal of these tariffs is especially significant given the structure of our current trade, where Kenya's main exports to Malaysia include tea, coffee, flowers, avocados and titanium ores, while imports from Malaysia consist primarily of edible oils and fats, chemical products, electronics, agricultural chemicals and rubber.

"This profile underscores the importance and potential of broadening our commercial ties," he said.

Meanwhile, Bernama reported that Anwar lauded Kenya's strong commitment to poverty alleviation and affordable housing, describing it as "remarkable leadership".

Relating it to Malaysia's own approach in tackling hardcore poverty, Anwar said: "I am, like you, very, very passionate about poverty alleviation, housing for the poor and for the masses."

He said the East African nation's ambitious programme to build more than 150,000 housing units for low-income communities reflected an outstanding model of leadership.

Anwar said he was particularly inspired by Kenya's focus on using power and governance to uplift the poor, adding that such efforts were in line with the spirit of the late Jomo Kenyatta's struggle to champion the welfare of the masses. Kenyatta was Kenya's first president and a key leader in the country's independence movement, serving from 1964 until his death in 1978.

Anwar also emphasised that Malaysia and Kenya had no reason not to elevate bilateral cooperation, especially in trade and investment.

He said Malaysia was ready to share its expertise in the semiconductor and electrical and electronics sectors, while also learning from Kenya's rapid development and strong determination.

This was Anwar's final stop in a three-country working visit to Africa. Earlier, he visited Ethiopia before travelling to South Africa.