

Uganda, Tanzania set deadline to scrap trade barriers

BY PHILIP WAFULA

KAMPALA. Uganda and Tanzania have set June 30 as the deadline to eliminate outstanding non-tariff barriers as the two neighbours seek to repair a trade relationship currently weighed down by a \$2.4 billion (about Shs9 trillion) imbalance.

The directive emerged from the Fifth Session of the Joint Permanent Commission (JPC), whose outcomes were signed by Uganda Minister of State for Foreign Affairs John Mulimba, and Tanzania's Minister for Foreign Affairs and East African Cooperation Mahmoud Thabit Kombo in Dar es Salaam on Friday.

The urgency follows trade data for 2025 showing Tanzania exported goods worth \$2.7 billion (about Shs10 tril-

lion) to Uganda, while Uganda's exports to Tanzania stood at just \$300 million (about Shs1.1 trillion). Negotiators from both countries say the current discussions are aimed at narrowing that gap.

Officials said the talks are now in the final stages of resolving long-running disputes over import charges and standards affecting products such as sugar, milk, steel and electric poles.

The commission also reviewed progress on several bilateral and regional infrastructure projects, notably the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (Eacop) and a number of cross-border energy initiatives.

Among the proposals under discussion are plans for a natural gas pipeline from Tanzania to Uganda and a refined petroleum products pipeline from Uganda to Tanzania's port city of Tan-

ga. The \$5 billion (about Shs18.7 trillion) Eacop, is designed to transport up to 230,000 barrels of crude oil per day.

In a statement, Uganda's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said both sides agreed to move beyond diplomatic engagements and focus on practical solutions to trade bottlenecks affecting key commodities and cross-border movement.

"The time for action is now; the responses to the expectations of the people must be demonstrated in real outcomes," Mr Mulimba said after the meeting.

Mr Kombo said the discussions reflected a broad strategic partnership covering areas such as diplomacy, immigration, health and education.

Technical teams from both countries have also been tasked with resolving the remaining border demarcation is-

ssues as the project targets a technical start-up in July and first oil exports in October 2026.

Ambassador Richard Kabonero, Uganda's head of regional cooperation, called for sustained efforts to eliminate practical obstacles affecting trade.

The commission also noted progress on the 24-hour operation of the Mutukula One Stop Border Post, harmonisation of road user charges at \$10 (about Shs37,000) per 100 kilometres, and the commissioning of the 14-megawatt Kikagati-Murongo Hydropower Project. Both countries also signed an agreement to fast-track construction of the Isaka-Lusahunga-Murongo Standard Gauge Railway, which will link the Port of Dar es Salaam to neighbouring countries.