Business Daily

EXPORTS

China opens door to African goods with zero-tariff access

From May 1, China will remove tariffs on all goods from 53 African countries with diplomatic ties to Beijing, like Uganda and Kenya.

Exports. |

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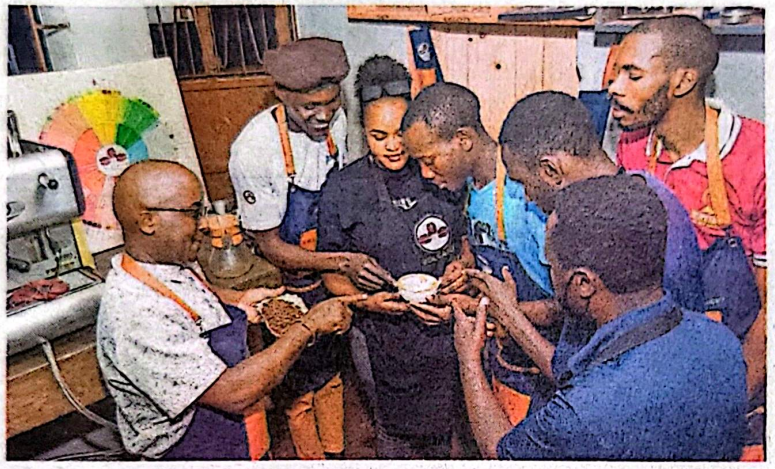
China is offering zero-tariff access to African exports from countries like Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania to strengthen its investment dominance and secure a large share of multibillion-dollar major infrastructure deals through the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

Beijing believes that this policy – coming at a time when the world is recovering from the Trump administration's unilateral tariffs that upended global trade and imposed a baseline tariff of 10 percent on exports from Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Ethiopia – will help Africa attract investments to produce quality exports.

"China welcomes more high quality products and services from all over the world, said Ambassador Li Yongjie, China's Permanent Representative to the World Trade Organisation (WTO). She was speaking to journalists from Africa, Caribbean and Pacific regions on the sidelines of the 14th trade ministers' conference in Cameroon last month.

"Zero-tariff treatment is not just a trade measure, but also an investment tool. While supporting African exports, we hope the policy helps attract global investments to Africa and accelerate Africa's integration into the global supply chain," Ms Yongjie said.



Mr Gerald Katabazi (left), the founder of Volcano Coffee takes on trainees in a cappuccino session at the plant in Nakawa. PHOTO/MICHAEL KAKUMIRIZI

Over the past decade, Uganda has attracted Chinese capital in its manufacturing sector, including two China focused industrial parks that focus on import substitution, with significant investments worth over $1 billion. These are the China-Uganda Liaoshen 34 factory complex, commonly known as Namunkekera Industrial Park in Kapeeka, Luwero district, and the Sino-Uganda Mbale Industrial Park.

Products

Liaoshen's range of products includes ceramics, fruit juices and textiles, while the mainstay of its offshoot Namunkekera is agro processing. Sino-Uganda Mbale Park, on the other hand has 73 operational factories producing steel, textiles and electronics, including mobile phones for the local market and export.

Zhang Hao, the managing director of Liaoshen Industrial Park, says the group is investing in another industrial park, the Liaoshen Mineral Industrial Park in Manafwa District, eastern Uganda, focused on the processing and manufacturing of mineral products.

Ms Yongjie noted that while unilateral tariffs have disrupted the global trade order in recent years, the rules-based multilateral trading system of the WTO also faces the risk of regressing to a law of the jungle, based on power.

As countries in the global south wait for the multilateral trading system to introduce reforms that work for everyone, their diplomats argue that the elimination of tariffs by major economies gives the developing world a fair shot at inclusive trade.

For instance, while China never seeks trade surpluses, its enormous market of 1.4 billion people generates strong demand for global goods and services. In 2025, China's goods imports reached approximately $2.64 trillion, making it the world's second-largest import market for 17 consecutive years.

Key figures

$138m

China's imports from Uganda accounted for $138 million

The Chinese envoy revealed that Beijing supports the AfCFTA – seen as the one-stop centre and entry point for trading in Africa, for foreign conglomerates' and interests. Through this initiative, Beijing is aligning its Belt and Road Initiative for a connected continent with major highways, railway networks, ports, and power generation infrastructure.

"We encourage Chinese companies to participate in African infrastructure projects on a commercial basis, to help reduce logistics costs," she said, adding that entrepreneurs from China also seek to invest in agricultural processing, auto assembly, home appliances, new energy and the digital economy.

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