

Ugandan traders turn to Dar es Salaam port

With about six weeks left for Kenyans to go to the polls, the private sector in neighbouring states are now beginning to look at the Dar es Salaam port as an alternative route to import and export goods.



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Kenya's main port of Mombasa, which according to latest reports, registered 11% cargo growth in the first quarter of 2017, serves Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, South Sudan, and DR Congo.

Although much preferred by the business community, the abrasions of the post-election violence of 2007/8 are still fresh because of its adverse effect on regional economies.

Uganda's private sector is not taking chances saying Dar es Salaam Port should permanently resume its use.

Private Sector Foundation of Uganda Gideon Badagawa executive director hopes the elections will be calm and peaceful - Kenyan leaders and voters must have learnt their lessons from the 2007 experiences.

"We have seen both Raila and Uhuru commit to peaceful elections and calling on their supporters to avoid violence. Of course better said than done! We, nevertheless, are hopeful that the environment for business shall not be much distorted," he said.

'Plan B'

Badagawa added Uganda needs to have 'a plan B'. "It might be a good idea to begin opening up and using the route through Dar es Salaam," he said.

Kampala City Traders Association spokesperson Issa Sekitto said goods, during this period, should go through the Central Corridor.

Uganda's leading export commodity, coffee, is transited through Mombasa Port and many exporters saw their stocks pile in 2007.

This time round, coffee exporters are not taking a wait-and-see attitude due to concerns about potential violence during the polls.

Joseph Nkandu, the executive director of National Union of Coffee Agribusiness and Farm Enterprises, a farmers organisation involved in the production and export of coffee, said the 2007 election violence in Kenya was a big lesson to Kenyans and the landlocked countries who export and import goods through Kenya including Uganda.

"Definitely this becomes more than an individual company to handle but rather a country strategy. All of us as exporters and government of Uganda we must join hands for plan B Tanzania," Nkandu told *Daily Monitor*.

He admitted that although Dar es Salaam, over 1,700 kilometres, comes with added costs of more than 20%, it is less than diversion costs in case violence erupts.

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