

Economy 

SA to boost continental trade ties as US tariffs bite

With more than 100 000 jobs and a R35bn citrus industry at risk, the government is seeking new markets to offset the damage from US tariffs.

By Ana Monteiro, Bloomberg · 4 Aug 2025 ⌚ 10:50



The US is the largest destination for South African exports after China, accounting for \$8.8bn last year. Image: Dwayne Senior/Bloomberg

South Africa plans to seek new markets for its goods to offset the impact on its exports from Washington's imposition of 30% tariffs on the nation's goods entering the US.

"In the coming months, we will be scaling up our trade missions into new markets in Africa and beyond" President Cyril Ramaphosa said in his weekly newsletter Monday. The government will

also boost a so-called National Exporter Development Programme, which aims to “grow the pool of export-ready companies,” he said.

President Donald Trump on Thursday imposed a 30% tariff on imports from South Africa — the highest in sub-Saharan region — among a slew of levies that are being introduced in his revised global plan.

The levies could put more than 100 000 jobs in South Africa’s auto and agricultural sectors at risk, central bank Governor Lesetja Kganyago warned last month. The country already has one of the world’s highest unemployment rates and tepid economic growth.

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Jendamark Automation, a Gqeberha, South Africa-based company that builds machinery and software for the automotive industry, lost contracts valued at 750 million rand (\$42 million) because of the duties, City Press reported Sunday, citing Managing Director Siegfried Lokotsch.

Pretoria has “been engaging” the US “to enhance mutually beneficial trade and investment relations,” Ramaphosa said. “All channels of communication remain open to engage with the US.”

The US is the largest destination for South African exports after China, accounting for \$8.8 billion last year, data from the tax agency show.

Earlier this month, South Africa’s biggest farm lobby warned that the tariffs would immediately hit the 35 billion-rand citrus industry because the measures coincide with the current picking season.

Finding new markets for agricultural exports “will take time and is costly,” Wandile Sihlobo, the chief economist at the Agricultural Business Chamber of South Africa, said in a statement Monday. “Diversification should not be viewed as a replacement for the US, but as part of the long-standing focus on export expansion and growth strategy for the South African agricultural sector.”

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