



International Desk

Iranian President Ebrahim Raeisi was welcomed by Kenyan President William Ruto in Nairobi on Wednesday as he began a three-country tour of Africa that will also take him to Uganda and Zimbabwe.

Raeisi was honored with a 21 gun-salute after he arrived at Kenya's State House in Nairobi. Then both presidents co-chaired bilateral talks between delegations from both sides after they held a private meeting.

Raeisi and Ruto then oversaw a signing of several agreements reached between the two countries.

'Turning point' in relations

After the ceremony, the Iranian president described his trip as a "turning point" in bilateral relations, noting that it can create a good market for Iranian products in Kenya and East Africa.

"Just as Iran cooperates with countries in the Persian Gulf and Central Asia, Kenya has relations with East African states. The relationship between the two countries will provide the ground for such contacts," he added.

Raeisi insisted that both countries are aiming to materialize a 10-fold surge in their economic cooperation.

"We do not see any obstacles in the development of relations and this can help expand [our] ties."

Ready for more cooperation

President Raeisi voiced Iran's readiness to cooperate with Kenya in the fields of petrochemicals, agriculture, science, technology, medicine and medical equipment, as well as the fishery industry and the fight against narcotics. Kenya's president, for his part, described Iran as "a critical strategic partner for Kenya," and said the two governments had signed five MoUs (memoranda of understanding) focusing on areas including information technology, investment promotion and fisheries. He noted that Kenya's arms are open to Iranian investors and businessmen. Ruto also told reporters that Raeisi had also shared plans for Iran to set up a plant in the port city of Mombasa "to manufacture an indigenous Iranian vehicle that has now been given the Kiswahili name, 'Kifaru', meaning rhino."

Iran's House of Innovation and Technology

During his visit, the Iranian president also visited Iran's House of Innovation and Technology in Nairobi, as one of the leading centers in the development of the export of knowledge-based products. During his visit, Iran showcased two domestically-manufactured agricultural and mapping drones for possible trade and export to the African country. Raeisi's trip to Africa is the first by an Iranian president in more than a decade. The trip, which was due to begin on Tuesday, was delayed by a day to finalize memoranda of understanding. The last Iranian president to visit Africa was Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2013. Iran had stepped up its diplomatic efforts to expand relations with developing countries after then-US president Donald Trump ditched a nuclear pact in 2018 and re-imposed sanctions. In June, Raeisi visited Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua, where he signed numerous agreements in different fields with those countries.

East Africa opens arms to Iran