Regional industrial development, investment and cross-border trade are at the centre of discussions at the 25th summit of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), where Rwanda is represented by Prime Minister Justin Nsengiyumva on behalf of President Paul Kagame.

The summit, taking place in Zimbabwe's capital on Thursday, is being held under the theme, "One Market, One Future: Fostering Inclusive Industrialisation, Investment and Regional Integration."

The agenda highlights efforts to strengthen economic links among the bloc's 21 member states, with particular attention to industries and supply chains that can help countries retain more value from their products.

Agriculture, manufacturing and critical minerals are among the priority sectors expected to feature in discussions on value addition. Strengthening these sectors could create opportunities for businesses to serve wider regional markets and support industrial development across member states.

Leaders are also expected to discuss measures to encourage investment and improve economic integration, while reviewing progress under existing regional initiatives.

A key item on the agenda is the presentation of COMESA's Medium-Term Strategic Plan for 2026-2030, which will outline the bloc's priorities for the next five years.

For Rwanda, participation in the regional market offers a framework for expanding trade with neighbouring and other member countries. Rwanda joined the COMESA Free Trade Area on Jan. 1, 2004, alongside Burundi, allowing qualifying goods to benefit from reduced or eliminated customs duties under the bloc's trade arrangements.

COMESA was established on Dec. 8, 1994, replacing the Preferential Trade Area created in 1981. It is headquartered in Lusaka, Zambia, and works to reduce trade barriers, promote investment and deepen economic cooperation among its members.

Its 21 members are Burundi, Comoros, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius,

Rwanda, Seychelles, Somalia, Sudan, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.