
Cuba Has Big Ambitions for Expanded Port

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Cuba is aiming to transform the northwestern port of Mariel, currently being expanded with Brazilian financing, into a regional trading hub, official media said.

The containers terminal being built at Mariel, 45 kilometers (28 miles) west of Havana, will be an important entry and departure point for merchandise and the heart of the Special Development Zone at the port complex, state television said in a report.

The details of the project were announced after Cuban President Raul Castro and Brazilian counterpart Dilma Rousseff on Tuesday toured the expansion project at the port, which is being upgraded at a cost of \$900 million, including a \$640 million Brazilian loan.

A Cuban construction firm and Brazilian engineering giant Odebrecht are in charge of the expansion plan, which is the most significant investment project currently being carried out on the Communist-ruled island with Brazilian financing.

Once the upgrade is complete, the Mariel deep-water port will more efficiently handle the flow of imported and exported merchandise, capitalize on Cuba's geographic position as the "key to the Gulf" and become a regional trading hub, the report said.

Projects being carried out at Mariel's Special Development Zone include a 2,000-meter (6,550-foot) dock capable of accommodating deep-draft vessels and a terminal with the capacity to receive 3 million containers a year.

The first 700 meters of the dock and a section of the container terminal are being built in the first stage of the expansion.

A total of 2,000 workers from nearby towns, including engineers, operators and welders, have been hired during

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the construction phase.

The terminal, which will begin operating in 2013 before construction work is completed, eventually will receive ships carrying cargo destined for other ports in the Caribbean and other parts of the Americas.

The construction project includes warehouses, cold-storage facilities, fuel supply, food distribution and other services.

Mariel, which is to become Cuba's largest port, also will have a road and rail network that links up to existing highways to guarantee efficient handling of the additional traffic generated by the port expansion.
