
Cuba, Japan explore an expansion of trade

11/06/2014



Cuba's ambassador to Japan, Marcos Rodríguez Costa, met in Tokyo on Tuesday (June 10) with Deputy Minister of the Economy, Trade and Industry Midori Matsushima for "an exchange of impressions about the various aspects of the bilateral relations in those sectors," the Prensa Latina news agency reported.

According to a note issued by the Cuban Embassy, Matsushima and Rodríguez "analyzed the potential for the development and expansion of the economic and commercial links between the two countries."
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Mrs. Matsushima is also in charge of Latin American and Caribbean Affairs. She visited Cuba in May 2007, when she was Deputy Foreign Minister, she told Rodríguez.

During the meeting, Rodríguez emphasized "the importance that more Japanese businesses participate in Cuba's development plans and provided details of the process of actualization of Cuba's economic and social model," Prensa Latina said.

To that end, he gave Mrs. Matsushima a copy of the Law on Foreign Investment in Cuba, translated into Japanese, and described the advantages of the Special Development Zone at Port Mariel, west of Havana.

Cuba exported to Japan 1.2 billion yen (US\$11.7 million) in fish, tobacco and coffee in 2012, the last year for which complete figures were available, according to the Japanese Foreign Ministry. In turn, Japan exported to Cuba 1.8 billion yen (\$17.6 million) in machinery, electrical machinery and precision instruments.

[Dollar figures are at the 2014 rate of exchange.]

As of the end of fiscal year 2011, Japan had given Cuba 2.1 billion yen (\$20.5 million) in grant aid and 4.6 billion yen (\$45 million) in technical cooperation. As of the end of fiscal year 2012, Japan had given Cuba 260 million yen (\$2.54 million) in cultural grants and 18.7 million yen (\$182.726) in grants for cultural grassroots projects, official Japanese figures show.

In November 2012, in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, Japan sent to Cuba 31 million yen's worth (\$303,000) of emergency relief goods.

In a memorandum sent last month (May 23) by the Japanese Embassy to the Foreign Ministry in Tokyo, the embassy recommended the following:

"Cuba is trying to attract foreign investment and make its national industry more efficient and diverse, at the same time that it diversifies its export goods, which at present are limited to basic products such as nickel.

"In addition, the country is immersed not only in introducing new technologies in the areas of health care and renewable energy but also in increasing the rate of alimentary self-reliance through the improvement of its production and efficiency, bearing in mind the rise in food price worldwide.

"It is important to continue [Japan's] cooperation with Cuba so that the country may effectively deal with its development plans, because — in addition to the fact that such cooperation contributes to solve the problems that beset Cuba — it could also serve to support the Japanese businesses that are weighing developing activities in Cuba."

Elsewhere, the document says that "Japan will offer cooperation in the field of agricultural development, including cattle raising and fisheries [... and] the production of rice, which has been a kingpin of Japanese cooperation."

And, to achieve sustainable development, "Japan will offer its cooperation in renewable energy [...] and the area of health care and social and economic infrastructures, where cooperation can be maintained hand in hand with the Japanese private sector."
