

Japan, US unlikely to agree on trade pact during Obama visit

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By dpa

Japan and the United States are not expected to announce agreement on a Pacific trade deal during a summit meeting this week between prime minister Shinzo Abe and US president Barack Obama, local media reported Tuesday.

Akira Amari, Japanese minister in charge of Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade negotiations, hinted that Obama's visit, starting Wednesday, was too soon for negotiators to bridge the differences between Japan and the US.

"There is still a considerable distance" between the two countries, Amari told a news conference, Kyodo News agency reported.

Japan is seeking to retain tariffs on five farm product categories - rice, sugar, wheat, beef and pork, and dairy products - amid strong concern from the country's highly-protected agricultural sector over the trade deal.

Meanwhile, Washington, which has urged Tokyo to open up its farm market further, wants to retain its auto tariffs as long as possible.

On Monday, a total of 63 US House lawmakers told US Trade Representative Michael Froman and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack in a letter to press Japan to make more efforts to eliminate trade barriers on agricultural products, Kyodo reported.

Obama's three-day visit to Japan will kick off a week-long Asian tour.

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