

U.S. president's visit

Japan welcomes U.S. President Barack Obama as state guest

U.S. President Barack Obama is paying a state visit to Japan through May 25.

During his three-day visit to Japan from Wednesday, President Obama is scheduled to have a summit meeting with Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to discuss a wide range of subjects, including their security alliance and the Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade pact.

Japan is the first stop on Obama's latest Asia trip, followed by South Korea, Malaysia and the Philippines. Obama will travel to South Korea on April 25, Malaysia on April 26 and the Philippines on April 28 before departing for Washington the following day.

In the summit meeting between Obama and Abe scheduled for Thursday, they are expected to reaffirm the importance of the security alliance between the two countries for the region's peace amid concerns over North Korea's nuclear and missile programs as well as China's maritime expansion.

Obama and Abe are also likely to discuss the stalled TPP trade pact and the plan to relocate the U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma in Okinawa Prefecture, another stalled subject and a key component for realignment of the U.S. military in the Asia-Pacific region.

The TPP is a trade agreement with 12 countries involved in the U.S.-led negotiations. The

agreement seeks to manage trade, promote growth and regionally integrate the economies of the Asia-Pacific region.

The negotiations have stalled mainly because Japan and the U.S. — the two largest economies involved — could not reach a bilateral agreement. Participants in the TPP talks had hoped to reach an agreement by the end of 2013.

Representatives of the two countries have held numerous discussions on the TPP and began a fresh round of talks in Tokyo on Monday, but the talks did not yield significant progress.

Akira Amari, the state minister in charge of TPP negotiations, and his counterpart, U.S. Trade Representative Michael Froman had a meeting in Washington D.C. on Friday, in which Amari acknowledged there are still "fairly big" gaps in the negotiating positions, but noted "the gaps are getting smaller."

The two countries have been at loggerheads over Japan's tariffs in five agricultural product categories — rice, wheat, beef and pork, dairy products and sugar — and U.S. calls for more access to the Japanese auto industry.

In particular, Japan's intention to maintain tariffs on beef and pork has been a sticking point as American livestock farmers are looking to boost exports to Japan.

Some trade observers were expecting progress in the U.S.-led TPP talks after Tokyo and Canberra reached an agreement on a free trade pact that includes tariff cuts on Australian beef and Japanese automobiles.

Froman has said, however, that the TPP is aiming for a higher level of trade liberalization than the Japan-Australia deal, suggesting Washington wants Tokyo to make greater efforts to eliminate tariffs.

The relocation of the Futenma air base is a long-standing issue between Washington and Tokyo and Obama and Abe are likely to agree to do their best to resolve the issue. Both governments have agreed that the Futenma base is to be relocat-

ed to Henoko Bay in Nago, also in Okinawa Prefecture, sometime in the future, but the plan has met with strong resistance from local residents.

Nago Mayor Susumu Inamine vowed in February to do his utmost to block the central government's efforts to build a replacement for the Futenma base in the city. Inamine defeated a pro-base rival to win re-election in January.

Regarding maritime defense near the Senkaku Islands, Obama may reiterate the U.S. commitment to defend Japan under the Japan-U.S. security treaty, as U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel indicated to Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida earlier this month. But it re-

mains to be seen if Obama will specifically address the dispute over the Senkakus, claimed as Diaoyu by China and Tiaoyutai by Taiwan.

Kishida told Hagel that Japan hopes to "maintain and reinforce the deterrence of the Japan-U.S. alliance" by advancing work on reviewing the bilateral defense cooperation guidelines by the end of the year.

Abe and Obama will hold a summit and joint news conference Thursday after Obama completes an arrival ceremony at the Imperial Palace in the morning, said Ben Rhodes, deputy U.S. national security adviser, who gave a detailed itinerary for the president's Asia trip.

Obama will also attend a se-

ries of other events at the palace, including a banquet with Emperor Akihito and Empress Michiko.

On Thursday afternoon, Obama will attend a youth event at the National Museum of Emerging Science and Innovation, known as Miraikan, and visit Meiji Shrine, which was built in honor of Emperor Meiji following his death in 1912, according to Rhodes.

Former U.S. Presidents Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush also visited the Shinto shrine when they visited Japan.

The Japanese government welcomes Obama as a state guest — the first such treatment for a U.S. president since Bill Clinton in 1996.



U.S. President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe attend the Nuclear Security Summit in The Hague on March 24. KYODO

This is Obama's third visit to Japan since becoming president in 2009 and his first visit since he attended APEC Japan 2010, in Yokohama.

With information taken from Kyodo News and the official website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Amway Japan
welcomes
the President of
the United States of America
Barack Obama
with warmest regards
and best wishes

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on the Occasion of
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