

Nicaragua national day

Increasing Japan's friendly relations with Central American nation

The entire nation of Nicaragua celebrates Sept. 15, the day on which the country won independence from Spain in 1821.

Nicaragua is the largest country in the Central American isthmus, with an area of about 130,000 sq. km. Its estimated population was 6.1 million in 2012 and life expectancy at birth was 72.7 years in 2011.

The Nicaraguan economy is growing. Gross domestic product surged by 54.8 percent to \$10.5 billion in 2012 from \$6.79 billion in 2006, while the inflation rate dropped to 6.6 percent from 9.4 percent in the same

time frame. Exports surged 2.5-fold and imports almost doubled.

As the economy grows, the people's welfare thrives. The Overall Poverty Index fell to 42.5 in 2009 from 50.3 in 1993 and the Extreme Poverty Index fell to 14.6 from 19.4 in the same time frame in Nicaragua, according to EMNV, which is a living standard survey supported by the World Bank. The undernourished population was 20 percent in the 2010-2012 period, down from 55 percent in the 1990-1992 period.

Nicaragua pushes for the use of renewable energy to contrib-

ute to reduction of carbon dioxide emissions. The percentage of renewable energy used in power generation was 40 percent and 60 percent for oil in 2011, compared with 25 percent of power from renewable energy and 75 percent from oil in 2006.

Nicaragua aims to increase the percentage for renewable energy to 95 percent in 2017.

As the Nicaraguan economy booms, private-sector interactions between Japan and Nicaragua become more active.

The Japan Nicaragua Friendship Association, based in Tokyo, is among those who congratulate the national day of the Central American country.

The friendship association also celebrates its 20th anniversary this year.

"We want to help with grassroots diplomacy in the private sector," said Go Nagasaka, representative senior managing director of Koizumi Co., a housing product trading company that also serves as the representative office of the Japan Nicaragua Friendship Association.

The association's main job is to arrange various exchange events for Nicaraguan politicians coming to Japan. For example, it helps arrange a meeting event with Nicaraguan delegates and Japanese companies to encourage the latter to invest in the Central American country.

In one of the recent activities, the association organized a meeting to welcome Samuel Santos Lopez, Nicaraguan min-

ister of foreign affairs, in Tokyo on June 19. Nicaraguan Ambassador to Japan Saul Arana Castellon, his wife, and the association's advisor, Taimei Yamaguchi, a Lower House member, also participated.

Santos came to Japan to exchange documents on the agreement that Japan will loan up to ¥1.496 billion to Nicaragua for its plan to build energy-saving infrastructure and promote renewable energy.

During the visit, Santos met with Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida to discuss the yen loan and Nicaragua's plan to construct a canal connecting the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. Santos expressed his hope that Japanese companies would join the construction project.

In light of the bilateral relation, the friendship association is planning 20th anniversary events. It is planning to organize a tour for Japanese members, who are mainly Koizumi employees, employees of Koizumi's business partners and others who are interested in Nicaragua, to visit Nicaragua. The association has done so twice and this will be the third such tour.

The association also plans to make a donation and offer technological support for Nicaraguan friendship and philanthropic organizations as a token of the bilateral affinity.

The association holds a general assembly of its members once a year. For this year, there was one at the Keio Plaza Hotel

in Tokyo in Shinjuku on July 22, in which it announced the various 20th anniversary events. A Nicaraguan photo exhibition was also held at the general assembly venue.

Koizumi serves as the repre-

sentative office of the association because the company's former chairman, Tsutomu Nagasaka, was a close friend of the late Yoshihiko Tsuchiya, a veteran politician who worked hard on supporting Nicaragua when he

was an Upper House member.

Koizumi, which imports products and materials from mainly Asian countries, such as China, South Korea and Taiwan, and has a golf-resort hotel in the U.S., does not currently have business with Nicaragua, but "would like to consider some kind of business involvement," Nagasaka said.

"We have a close relationship with the (Nicaraguan) government, and thus we are ready to do something if there is a chance," he said.

Nagasaka also stressed that Nicaragua is a good place to visit as it is a safe country in Central America that is rich in agricultural products, with cows and coffee trees, he added.



Multiple views: A Nicaragua photo exhibition is held during the general meeting of the Japan Nicaragua Friendship Association, which marks its 20th anniversary this year, at a hotel in Tokyo on July 22. JAPAN NICARAGUA FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATION

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Congratulations to the People of Nicaragua on the 192nd Anniversary of Their Independence Day

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