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Philippines, Japan strengthen agricultural trade, tech ties

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Philippine Agriculture Secretary Francisco Tiu Laurel Jr. and Japanese Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Shinjiro Koizumi met on the sidelines of the 47th ASEAN Agriculture and Forestry Ministers Meeting to discuss deeper bilateral cooperation in agriculture, including enhanced trade, technology transfer, and sustainability efforts.

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Secretary Tiu Laurel requested improved market access for Philippine pomelo and reiterated the countryâ??s long-standing appeal for the elimination of tariffs on fresh bananas, which currently face duties of up to 18 percent. Despite being Japanâ??s top banana supplier, the Philippinesâ?? market share dropped to 75 percent in 2024 from 94 percent in 2023.

Asked during a news conference in whether the tariff issue in Philippine banana was discussed, Secretary Tiu Laurel said: â??Yes, that was definitely discussed in our bilateral meeting. The Minister (Koizumi) promised to look into it. I told him the Philippine will persistently pursue this. I really hope we can resolve this issue as soon as possible.â?

â??But of course they have their position. The Philippines is also going through the avenue CEPTâ?¦on duty-free to Japan. But it might take time, a few years to complete. So we are looking at the angle of bilateral agreements to speed up the process,â?• he added.

Koizumi holds a lot of sway in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, and according to a Mainichi Shimbun survey, is the top choice among party faithfulâ??s to replace Prime Minister and LDP president Shigeru Ishiba, who had stepped down.

Japan, the Philippinesâ?? second-largest importer of agriculture and fishery products in 2024â??with purchases exceeding USD 1 billionâ??has also expressed interest in exporting fresh grapes to the Philippine market. Minister Koizumi confirmed that Japan has submitted a pest risk analysis and technical documents to the Bureau of Plant Industry of the Department of Agriculture to support its request.

Beyond trade, both countries are looking to expand cooperation in technology and sustainability. Tiu Laurel welcomed Japanâ??s continued support under existing frameworks such as the ASEAN-Midori Cooperation Plan and the Philippines-Japan Memorandum of Cooperation (MOC) on Agriculture. He proposed extending the Philippines-Japan MOC to cover fisheries, and technical cooperation that will support modernization and digitalization of the Philippine agriculture and fisheries sector. These will cover smart agriculture, research and development, technology transfer, postharvest technology, mechanization, diagnostic laboratory upgrading, and development, and pest and disease management.

Secretary Tiu Laurel also expressed gratitude for Japanâ??s recent donation of rice to calamity-affected communities through the ASEAN Plus Three Emergency Rice Reserve â?? Tier 3 Program. He reaffirmed the Philippinesâ?? interest in deepening ties ahead of the 70th anniversary of normalized diplomatic relations in 2026, including hosting the second Philippines-Japan Joint Committee on Agriculture (JCA) at a mutually agreed date next year.

The meeting also addressed Japanâ??s proposal for accelerating the implementation of the Joint Crediting Mechanism between the two countries, particularly in adopting Alternate Wetting and Drying (AWD) technology for rice farming. The initiative could become the worldâ??s first bilateral carbon credit program in the agriculture sector. Tiu Laurel expressed support for the effort, noting its potential to boost sustainable farming practices and reduce emissions.

In line with its green agenda, Japan has also invited the Philippines to participate in GREENxEXPO 2027, an international horticulture exhibition scheduled to take place in Yokohama. Tiu Laurel confirmed the Department of Agricultureâ??s interest, noting increasing private sector engagement in floriculture, horticulture, and high-value crop exports. He added that consultations with other government agencies are ongoing to determine the scope of the countryâ??s participation