

# Brazil's Lula to build trade ties on Japan state visit

AFP – Brazil's president starts a four-day state visit to Japan on Monday, accompanied by a 100-strong business delegation as US tariffs push the countries to nurture trade ties elsewhere.

Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba are also expected to discuss the joint development of biofuels ahead of November's COP30 UN climate summit in the Brazilian Amazon.

In talks on Wednesday, the leaders will reportedly restate their commitment to free trade following US President Donald Trump's levies on steel and other imports.

"Everyone who was talking about free trade is now practising protectionism," Lula, 79, said ahead of his departure.

"I think this protectionism is absurd," he told Japanese media.

Brazil is the second-largest exporter of steel to the United States after Canada, shipping four million tonnes of the metal in 2024.

Lula and Ishiba will likely agree to regular leaders' visits and to establishing strategic dialogue on security and other matters, Japanese media reported.

The pair may also affirm the importance of the rules-based international order, a phrase often used to make a veiled dig at Chinese foreign policy.

– Beef to planes –

A welcome ceremony will be held for the left-wing president on Tuesday at Tokyo's Imperial Palace, followed by a state

banquet that evening.

It will be Lula's third visit to Japan, the world's fourth-largest economy, as president of Brazil.

Ramping up Brazilian exports to Japan – from beef to planes – is a key objective for Lula, who on Wednesday will attend an economic forum aimed at forging new opportunities.

China is currently Brazil's top trading partner, with Japan trailing behind as its 11th largest partner globally, according to Brazilian officials.

Brazil has "increased its commercial dependence on China in recent years", Karina Calandrin, a professor at business school Ibmecc in Sao Paulo, told AFP.

But since taking office in January, Trump has slapped tariffs amounting to a 20 percent hike on Chinese overseas shipments, which last year reached record levels.

This, Calandrin said, "puts Brazil at risk, making it more vulnerable to any change in the international scenario".

Yet efforts to diversify foreign trade could prove difficult given the South American powerhouse's "structural dependence" on commerce with China, said Roberto Goulart, an international relations professor at Brasilia University.

A more balanced trade landscape for Brazil in the Asia-Pacific region is unlikely in "the short term", he said.

Meanwhile, Tokyo could see stronger ties with Brasilia as a way to keep Brazil from forming a closer relationship with China and Russia, fellow members of the BRICS emerging economies bloc.

– Apology –

Brazil is home to the world's largest Japanese diaspora, a

holdover of mass migration in the early 20th century.

Last year, Lula's government issued a historic apology for its persecution of Japanese immigrants during and after World War II.

Thousands living along the coast of Sao Paulo were forced off of their land in 1943, while at least 150 Japanese immigrants and their offspring later wound up incarcerated on a remote island.

An apology is "the least we can do to acknowledge our mistakes in the past", Lula told Japanese media ahead of the trip.

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