U.S. Says Differences Remain After Japan Trade Talks

The Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — U.S. and Japanese officials wrapped up a round of talks aimed at reducing trade barriers Friday, but differences remained over autos, insurance and other industries.

"These concerns remain," Acting Deputy U.S. Trade Representative Wendy Cutler told reporters at the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo. "The negotiations got off to a good start this week."

The three-day talks were linked to the bigger Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations, also held in Tokyo. Japan joined the U.S.-led negotiations for the regional free trade pact involving 12 countries on July 23.

Cutler said the "lack of a level playing field" in Japan's insurance industry is among the contentious issues, and the U.S. believes that Japanese government-backed insurance services run by the post office are at an advantage over private and foreign companies.

Non-tariff barriers for U.S. autos in Japan are another problem. Japanese cars are popular in the U.S., but American car sales are negligible in Japan.

Kyodo News quoted Takeo Mori, the head of the Japanese delegation, as saying both sides remained apart on various issues.

The talks for the regional trade agreement have set a year-end deadline to reach a deal.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is a proponent of the Pacific trade pact but resistance remains in some quarters, such as from farmers, while Toyota Motor Corp. and other Japanese automakers see it as a way to boost auto sales.

Abe is worried that Japan is falling behind the rest of Asia in forming free-trade deals, and has pushed forward with the regional negotiations despite risking domestic criticism.

Cutler said the talks will continue, but the date was not set.

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