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Colombia keen to boost economic, trade ties with Cuba, says president

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18/07/2017



Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos on Monday kicked off a two-day state visit to Cuba, where he hopes to expand economic and trade ties with the island country.

"My official visit has two goals: to thank the island's people and government (for their role) in the Colombian peace process, and to increase economic and trade ties," Santos said.

Cuba hosted the talks that led to a definitive peace deal between Colombia's government and leftist FARC rebels.

In Havana, Santos met with his Cuban counterpart Raul Castro and also took part in a bilateral business forum, where he said Colombia was in a process of greater economic opening that included boosting investment in Central America and the Caribbean.

The peace agreement has spurred the national economy and tourism, which grew nearly 40 percent in the first half of 2017, Cuba's state daily Granma said.

Some 20 Colombian business leaders attended the forum, representing a variety

of sectors, from construction to energy, chemicals and food.

Santos arrived in Cuba late Sunday accompanied by his ministers of foreign affairs, and trade, industry and tourism, as well as the head of Colombia's trade promotion agency ProColombia.

Santos was last in Cuba in June 2016, for the signing of the peace agreement.

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