

# South Korea and U.S. Reach Deal on Beef Imports

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SEOUL, South Korea — More than 10,000 people rallied in central Seoul on Saturday night to protest beef imports from the United States, despite an announcement hours earlier that Seoul and Washington had agreed to restrict the shipments to allay South Koreans' concerns about mad cow disease.

Although the protest was smaller than a June 10 rally that drew at least 100,000 people, it indicated that President Lee Myung-bak had a long way to go before regaining public confidence.

American trade envoys agreed to restrict beef exports to cattle less than 30 months old, officials said earlier in the day. Younger cattle are considered to pose less risk of mad cow disease, a fatal brain illness that is sometimes transmitted to humans.

Until Seoul banned imports in 2003 after a case of mad cow disease was detected in the United States, South Korea was the third largest overseas market for American beef, with imports totaling \$800 million a year.

President Lee, who took office less than four months ago, faced a political crisis set off by a public furor over a deal he struck with the United States in April.

The April agreement would have allowed American exporters to ship beef from all cattle. But fears that the meat might be infected, as well as grievances over other policies initiated by Mr. Lee, set off weeks of demonstrations, leading the government to ask the United States this month to revise the deal.

South Korea also won the right in the latest accord to inspect a sampling of American slaughterhouses, the trade minister, Kim Jong-hoon, said in a nationally televised news conference announcing the results of his week of talks in Washington with Susan C. Schwab, the United States trade representative.

“We really did our best,” Agriculture Minister Chung Woon-chun said in the news conference. “We did everything we could during the negotiation, including brinkmanship.”

Mr. Kim said he had taken a large aerial photograph of the June 10 demonstration with him to Washington. “When the American side rejected our demands, citing ‘science,’ I produced the picture and told them, ‘Look at this. Can we resolve this with science?’ ” he said.

Under the revised deal, American beef from cattle 30 months and older will be barred from South Korea “until consumers’ confidence improves,” Mr. Kim said. The American government will also provide an age certification for all meat shipped to South Korea.

Weeks of antigovernment protests had climaxed with the June 10 rally, which represented the largest outpouring of antigovernment sentiment since the end of military rule in the late 1980s, and virtually paralyzed Mr. Lee’s government. The entire cabinet offered to resign. Mr. Lee replaced 9 of his 10 senior presidential aides on Friday, apologized for the beef deal and pledged a fresh start to regain public trust in his government.

The size of the protests has decreased markedly since June 10. But organizers of the protests have remained unsatisfied, demanding a complete renegotiation to win better assurances to prevent mad cow disease. They also pushed for Mr. Lee to drop many of his pro-business domestic economic reforms.

“Lee Myung-bak Out! We want renegotiation!” the protesters chanted Saturday night. They said the revised deal was a government trick to quell the public anger without solving the problem.

In Washington, Ms. Schwab’s office confirmed the new deal. It characterized the new agreement as a “transitional measure to improve Korean consumer confidence in U.S. beef.”

“We look forward to safe, affordable, high-quality American beef — the same beef enjoyed by hundreds of millions of U.S. consumers and people in countries around the world — soon arriving on Korean tables,” Ms. Schwab said.

The United States also agreed not to export cattle parts like brains, eyes, skulls and spinal cords, which many Koreans fear may carry mad cow disease.