

South Korean opposition threatens court action against US beef

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SEOUL— South Korea's three opposition parties joined forces Friday and said they would file a lawsuit aimed at overturning a government decision to resume controversial imports of United States beef.

They also demanded the resignation of all members of President Lee Myung-Bak's cabinet and threatened further street protests which have been fuelled among the public by fears of mad cow disease.

"Today, we will file lawsuits with the court of administration and the Supreme Court aimed at nullifying" the decision to lift a ban on US beef imports, the opposition groups said in a statement.

"We demand the government's entire cabinet resigns," they said, adding cabinet members were responsible for growing public anger at the deal with Washington to resume beef imports.

Legal action was launched by the United Democratic Party Democratic Labor Party and the Liberty Forward Party. Their also leaders want talks with Lee, who was scheduled to return home late Friday from a visit to China.

Thousands of protestors have staged candle-lit demonstrations in Seoul and and other cities over the past six days demanding the ban remains in place.

Agriculture Minister Chung Woon-Chun on Thursday unveiled new rules on imports and for the inspection of US beef, which was expected to go on sale here next week.

The opposition claims the government has not secured safeguards against the alleged dangers posed by the human form of mad cow disease.

The resumption of beef imports was a pre-condition for Washington's approval of the separate free trade agreement with South Korea, which some analysts say could boost annual trade between the two nations by 20 billion dollars.

But South Korea's parliament failed to ratify the free trade deal due to an opposition boycott before the legislature dissolved Thursday to make way for a new assembly, in which Lee's Grand National Party holds a majority.