

## **S. Korea reaffirms 'no renegotiation' on U.S. FTA**

Yonhap

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SEOUL -- South Korea will not renegotiate a free trade agreement (FTA) with the U.S. as it already reflects a balance of interests for both sides, a high-ranking official said Wednesday.

The accord, known as the KORUS FTA, was signed in June 2007, but its ratification in both countries has been stymied by disagreements on auto and beef trade. Washington has been hinting at a possible renegotiation.

"The U.S. has not raised any issues so far," Ahn Ho-young, Seoul's deputy minister for trade, told reporters. "The trade pact is well-balanced ... Our stance is 'no renegotiation' on the trade pact," he said.

The South Korean government has reiterated that it will not revise the text of the deal itself, though some U.S. officials are reportedly hoping to address the concerns via side agreements.

South Korea's National Assembly has been delaying deliberations on the free trade deal, citing growing pessimism over the agreement in the U.S. Congress. But Seoul's parliamentary committee on foreign affairs and trade recently approved the pact, signaling a possible ratification during this month's plenary session.

U.S. President Barack Obama has opposed ratification of what he described as a "badly flawed" free trade agreement with South Korea, citing in particular an imbalance in auto trade.

The Democrat-controlled Congress has expressed concern that ratification of the deal will undermine support from U.S. trade unions, a key political base, due to possible job cuts amid the worst recession in decades.

But at their first and second summits in April and June, South Korean President Lee Myung-bak and Obama agreed that the free trade accord could bring benefits to both countries and committed to working together to chart a way forward. They also stressed the importance of avoiding protectionism and economic nationalism.

The accord, if it takes effect, will boost South Korea's economic growth by 6 percent over the long-term and help create 340,000 new jobs, according to the state-run Korea Institute for International Economic Policy.

The U.S., the world's largest economy and South Korea's second-largest trading partner, conducted US\$84.7 billion in two way trade last year.

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