

SKorea says US will lose out without FTA

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SEOUL— South Korea's trade minister said Tuesday that the United States could lose out on a "golden opportunity" to secure a firm bridgehead in the Korean market if it fails to ratify a free trade pact.

Kim Jong-Hoon also told US businessmen that the failure by either country's legislature to ratify the pact may have "negative repercussions" on relations.

The deal, signed by the two countries on June 30, awaits approval by both legislatures. The Democrat-led US Congress has indicated it may not approve the deal.

A failure of ratification may deprive Washington of "the golden opportunity to secure a firm position in the Korean market" ahead of the European Union, Canada and China, Kim said, according to Yonhap news agency.

"It would also undermine US leadership and credibility in promoting open markets and fair competition across the globe," he said.

Kim admitted that South Korea's imports restrictions on beef and cars have been "key obstacles" for US lawmakers to ratify the pact.

South Korea last year ended its total US beef ban imposed due to concerns over mad cow disease and allowed some imports. Washington wants Seoul to open its market wider.

"We should be mindful not to sacrifice the Korea-US FTA as a whole to cater to certain sectoral interests," Kim said, adding South Korea would try to resolve the beef issue soon.

Allegations that the Korean auto market is inaccessible are "simply not true," he added.

South Korea is the US's seventh-largest trade partner, with commerce between the two countries last year worth 78 billion dollars. Some studies show this could rise by up to 20 billion dollars in coming years under a free trade regime.