

Opposition Seeks Asian Alliance Over US Beef

By Kim Yon-se, Staff Reporter
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Opposition lawmakers are moving to actively inform foreign countries of the Lee Myung-bak administration's so-called "humiliating" beef import negotiations with the United States.

As a first step, the United Democratic Party (UDP) will hold a press conference with foreign correspondents in Seoul Tuesday.

The main opposition party plans to internationally publicize the necessity for holding "renegotiations" between Seoul and Washington. But the U.S. has expressed a cynical attitude toward revising the beef import deal.

The UDP plans to highlight the fact that South Korea is the only Asian country which promised full opening to all American beef irrespective of cattle age or whether or not it contains bones.

Observers say that an interesting point will be whether the American media will be sympathetic in highlighting the risks of possible mad cow disease in Korea now that the Lee administration has decided to import meat from U.S. and Canadian cattle aged up to 30 months or more.

Another point is whether the media from Asian countries, such as Japan, China and Taiwan, will carry articles aimed at urging their governments — that are also in beef talks with the U.S. — not to follow the case of Korea, they said.

Democratic U.S. presidential candidate Barack Obama, who had urged Seoul to fully open the beef market, said over the weekend that Japan must fully open its market to U.S. beef.

Obama was quoted by the Asian Wall Street Journal, as saying, "You can't get American beef into Japan ... even though we have the highest safety standards. They don't want competition."

Japan lifted a two-year ban on U.S. beef in 2006 but limited imports to meat from cattle aged less than 20 months. Washington is urging Japan to remove all barriers to American beef imports.

The UDP is considering dispatching a group of lawmakers to a hearing of the U.S. House of Representatives next month.

The delegates will include floor leader Rep. Kim Hyo-seuk.

Kim will also attend Tuesday's news conference, scheduled to be held at the Foreign Press Club in downtown Seoul.

He is likely to comment on President Lee's alleged sacrificing of the "national quarantine sovereignty" for faster ratification of the Korea-U.S. free trade agreement (FTA) by the U.S. Congress.

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