

# Han Calls for FTA Ratification

By Kim Sue-young  
The Korea Times  
September 7, 2007

Prime Minister Han Duck-soo stressed in a statement Friday that the free trade agreement (FTA) between the United States and South Korea is the most crucial step ahead for the country to join the ranks of advanced countries.

On the same day, the government submitted a bill on the deal to the National Assembly for approval.

The Assembly will endorse the bill if more than a majority of lawmakers who participate in the regular session vote for ratification.

However, the government will likely walk a rocky road because almost a quarter of lawmakers oppose the FTA.

“The FTA will be a cornerstone to strengthen the nation's economic competitiveness,” the prime minister said. “For this, the deal should promptly come into effect.”

Han said the government expects that productive discussions about the FTA will take place in the National Assembly and, if necessary, Cabinet members will participate in these to clarify doubts.

He also said that the government is prepared to share benefits gained from the economic deal with people who might sustain a loss.

The administration will come up with countermeasures to help the agricultural sector, especially farmers, he added.

Han vowed to formulate policies so that everyone can enjoy benefits from the FTA.

The prime minister expressed expectations that the FTA with the U.S. would form the basis for future deals with the E.U. and other nations such as China, Mexico and Canada.

However, it remains uncertain whether the Assembly will ratify the FTA due to the opposition of some lawmakers.

On Wednesday, more than 70 lawmakers from the pro-government United New Democratic Party, the main opposition Grand National Party and the minority Democratic Labor Party submitted a request to the Assembly, calling for an inspection of the FTA.

They insisted that the government had neglected public opinion opposing the deal, and failed to clarify suspicions regarding the agreement.

South Korea and the U.S. reached the FTA on April 2 after having eight rounds of negotiations and several informal talks.

Many people, including farmers and workers, staged rallies against the agreement calling the deal an unequal one.