

India, S. Korea to upgrade FTA at 'earliest'

Even as the India-South Korea Free Trade Agreement (FTA) will be expanded soon to boost bilateral trade and investment, New Delhi has voiced concerns about the low utilisation of the FTA by India due to the 'complicated' provisions in the pact as well as South Korea's regulations.

According to official sources, the recent bilateral talks in Seoul saw India cite the difficulties being faced by its English teachers in getting permission to teach in South Korea. Though, going by the FTA, Indian English language teachers should be getting opportunities to teach in primary and secondary schools in South Korea, this is not being implemented effectively in practice. This is because the 'English Program in Korea' (EPIK) stipulates that those eligible to teach English in South Korea must "be a citizen of a country where English is the primary language."

South Africa example

The EPIK specifies that "EPIK teachers must be citizens of one of the following countries: Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, U.K, U.S., or South Africa." India has now asked that it be included in the EPIK country-list by pointing out that South Africa was on the list though that country has 11 official languages including Afrikaans, and English was only one of them.

India is also keen on sending its yoga teachers for short-term work while Seoul has stated their services may not be needed since many Koreans are now learning yoga in India and returning to teach it in South Korea.

On the goods side, India is keen that norms are eased to upgrade the FTA in a way that Indian goods get greater market access.

Since the implementation of the FTA in 2010, India's trade deficit with South Korea has increased from about \$5 billion to more than \$8 billion.

To ensure greater market access for Indian products, India is seeking a set of mutually accredited bodies for export inspection.

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