

Pakistan is looking to increase remittances from overseas workers in Korea to make up for losses incurred from its participation “on the front line of the war on terror.” Sheikh Waqqas Akram, minister of Pakistan’s Human Resources Development, visited Korea from November 15 to 18

to up the number of skilled and unskilled workers the country sends to Korea annually and to market the Pakistani workforce to Korea employers.

Akram described the economic situation in Pakistan as reeling in the face of destruction wrought from the nation “being on the front line of the war on terror.”

He said the country has lost billions of dollars, in terms of lost foreign direct investment, ruined infrastructure, and from 1,000s either displaced or whose livelihoods are gone. On top of that, an earthquake in January displaced more in the restive region of Balochistan.

Akram said that remittances from overseas workers around the world in 2011 accounted for nearly half of Pakistan’s total export revenue, about \$11 billion, saying the country relied on remittances from workers abroad even more in 2010, when exports were down.

“The main purpose of our visit is to actually market Pakistan’s workers, both skilled and unskilled which we can export to Korea,” he said. “Specifically we signed an MOU in 2008 to export 8,000 workers to Korea,” Akram said. “So far we have sent 2,300,” adding “We have the ability to send some 5,000 each year.”

With the implementation agreement signed last month and another hammered out during his trip, Akram is confident Pakistan can send more workers to Korea and thereby increase remittances sent back home.

Some 1,400 Pakistanis are due to arrive in the three months from January. Akram met with the Minister of Labor and Human Resources Development Korea.

“We also want to get in touch with Korean employers, because after a policy shift in 2004 in

Korea, the choice is not up to the government but rather up to the employer as to which country they want to recruit workers from,” Akram said.

“So this trip is also a chance to explore those avenues, so we can talk with Korean employers directly.”

Pakistani Ambassador to Korea Shaukat Ali Mukadam said there is a tradition of Korean companies working with Pakistanis on significant construction projects. Korean companies employed Korean and Pakistani workers in major construction projects in the Middle East in the 1960s and 1970s.

Korea built Pakistan’s only major highway in 1997, a 420-kilometer stretch of asphalt and concrete between Islamabad and Lahore.

According to recent figures, 10,731 Pakistanis live in Korea, currently about 5,000 from the guest worker program of which 600 are skilled workers in SMEs and 100 engineers and IT specialists. Roughly the same number live and work in Japan.

They work in manufacturing, fisheries, construction, livestock, warehouse and cold storage facilities in Seoul, Incheon, Daegu and Busan.