

US rights group moves to cancel GSP facility

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paper submitted to the government. In its petition, AFL-CIO made four complaints which included violation of domestic and internationally recognised workers rights in EPZs, violation of domestic labour laws and internationally recognised labour standard in readymade garments industry, similar violations in shrimp and fish processing industries, and harassment and violence by government security forces against trade unions, workers and labour rights groups.

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) and BFEEA submitted to the commerce ministry their replies regarding these complaints.

The fisheries and livestock ministry also gave its views to the commerce ministry.

These have already been sent to the Bangladesh mission at Washington, which will compile these and submit to the USTR by September 21 next.

A high level team comprising representatives from the ministries of foreign affairs, commerce and fisheries and livestock, Bepza, BGMEA, BKMEA and BFEEA will visit Washington to participate in the hearing on the petition to be held on October 4.

The government has engaged the BGMEA lobbyist firm to lobby with the USTR in this regard.

BGMEA President Anwarul Alam Chowdhury said although Bangladeshi apparel sector or any major sectors do not enjoy GSP facilities from US, if the USTR

takes the petition into consideration and gives any decision against Bangladesh, it will seriously hamper Bangladesh's export interests in US.

Such a decision may give a wrong signal to US traders as well as consumers about use of Bangladeshi products, he noted.

India paves way for PM's China visit

AFP, New Delhi

India's senior foreign ministry official opened talks yesterday in Beijing to prepare for Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's first visit to China, expected later this year, an official said.

Shivshankar Menon, India's ambassador to China from 2000 to 2003, will be discussing dates and preparations for the two-day visit, the foreign ministry official said under cover of anonymity.

The head of India's ruling Congress Party, Sonia Gandhi, is also likely to visit China separately, Indian media reports said.

Menon was also expected to finalise dates for another meeting between Indian and Chinese officials on a decades-old border row, the official said.

India says China occupies 38,000 square kilometres (15,200 square miles) of its territory in Kashmir, while Beijing claims 90,000 square kilometres of the remote Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh.

The dispute erupted after a brief but bitter conflict in 1962, after which a formal ceasefire line was never established, but the border has remained mostly peaceful after agreements in 1993 and 1996.

A landmark civil nuclear deal between India and the United States under which New Delhi will get nuclear fuel and technology was also likely to figure on Menon's agenda, the Indian official said.