**5th EU-BD JEC Sub-group meet on Feb 27**

**'Service waiver' high on agenda**

FE Report

The Fifth European Union (EU)-Bangladesh Joint Economic Commission (JEC) Sub-group on Trade and Economic Development meeting will be held on February 27 at the state guest house Padma in the city.

A draft agenda of the meeting has already been sent from the European Commission (EC).

In this connection, an inter-ministerial preparatory meeting was held in the ministry of commerce (MoC) recently. Co-chair of the Sub-group on Trade and Economic Development and additional secretary of the MoC Manoj Kumar Roy presided over the meeting.

In the February 27 meeting, Bangladesh will place the issue of service waiver. The facility is aimed at supporting the growth of services trade in the least developed countries (LDCs) by providing their services exports with preferential treatment.

This is an important step in implementing a key Bali decision in favour of LDCs, which aims to enhance their participation in world services trade.

Besides, the country will discuss the Horizon-2020 fund issue in the meeting. The Horizon is the biggest EU Research and Innovation programme ever with nearly €80 billion of funding available over 7 years (2014 to 2020).

The meeting will also put forward a proposal for bilateral air links with European countries. A EU Horizontal Aviation Agreement was initiated on September 16, 2009 which restores legal certainty to the bilateral air services agreements between Bangladesh and EU member states. However, in order to resolve all legal issues at stake, some additional changes need to be introduced. This process is underway with the objective to conclude the agreement as soon as possible.

The agreement will modernise the legal framework for air services between Bangladesh and the EU and establish, for the first time, a direct legal relationship between Bangladesh and the EU in the field of civil aviation.

The outcomes of the first meeting of the newly established European Union Business Council Bangladesh will be discussed in the fifth meeting. Discussions on maritime issues and TRIPS waiver for the pharmaceutical sector will also come up in the meeting.

The EU is a single market of 28 countries where Bangladeshi products enjoy duty-free and quota-free access under the GSP/EBA. About 54.34 per cent of the country's total export earnings come from EU countries. The ready-made garment is the largest export item.

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