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Sri Lanka on track to get GSP+, more compliance needed: EU officials

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ECONOMYNEXT - Sri Lanka is on track to get GSP+ benefits perhaps in a matter of months, but progress on compliance has to be shown with international covenants to improve rights of citizens and rule of law, European Union officials said.

Full compliance can be reached after GSP+ is given again, but steady progress has to be made, they said.

EU Ambassador David Daly said discussions between a visiting EU team and Sri Lankan officials were positive and the environment "would have been very difficult to imagine a year ago."

However the onus is on Sri Lanka to deliver on its obligations under international covenants Sri Lanka had signed and commitments given to the international community, he said.

He said the GSP + 'cake is baked in Colombo' and what happened in Geneva and Brussels took from there.

Deputy Foreign Minister Harsha de Silva said the government was committed to improving human rights and reconciliation.

Based on the commitments given to the UN, a mechanism was being developed with wide consultation, he said.

Daly said the GSP+ benefit were given based on human rights, labour rights and environmental standards improved. ^

Daly said in measuring compliance in international civil and political rights covenants reports of relevant agencies that monitored the conventions in Geneva including the UN and the International Labour Organization.

EU officials said discussions on applying for GSP+ was now in progress and it was not necessary to have full implementation of all shortcoming for the benefits to be given again since some of the processes took time.

The criteria could be fully complied with after GSP+ is given.

He said progress has been made and

"I am confident that Sri Lanka will receive the scheme again," Deputy Head of GSP and Sustainable Development Unit, DG Trade, Nikos Zaimis said.

"It takes several months."

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He said the once the EU made the decision to grant GSP+, the European Parliament and Council of Ministers would query the decision and the Commission had to defend it.

Once an application was submitted the EU had to make a decision within six months and the Parliament had to vote within two months, with an extension of another two months.

He said they would be acting as 'lawyers' for Sri Lanka to justify why the concessions should be given. Sri Lanka had to show continuous progress.

Improving labour and environmental standards involve costs to exporters and duty free access allowed them to be recouped.

Saman Kelegama, head of Sri Lanka's Institute of Policy Studies and an expert on international trade said April/May would be a good time to apply for GSP+ when an EU fisheries ban expected to be lifted.

Sri Lanka had to make progress in rights of the child and torture and 85 percent of the work on the application was done, he said.

Daly said a recent cabinet decision to change laws to provide suspects' access to a lawyer after they make the first statement will also help towards GSP+.

Under the fifth amendment to the US constitution an arrested suspect can refrain from answering questions that incriminate them, and under the six amendment the right to a lawyer and other limits on police powers on citizens have been placed.



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