

MEDIA RELEASE: FORUM ON FTAs
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New Delhi

EU-INDIA FTA
PUBLIC INTEREST GROUPS DETAINED DURING PROTEST

New Delhi: As the 6th round of negotiations related to the EU-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA) got underway here today, the police detained several representatives of public interest groups during a peaceful protest in front of the office of the European Commission (EC). Trade bureaucrats from the EC and Indian Commerce Ministry will deliberate on issues ranging from services, manufacturing, trade facilitation and government procurement till 19 March.

Public interest groups were demonstrating against the secretive nature of negotiations on the FTA, which includes contentious issues such as agriculture, investment, fisheries, intellectual property and government procurement. Since the trade talks between the European Union and India were launched in Brussels in 2007, there has been no access to negotiating texts.

Pradip Dutta of the Delhi Network of Positive People asserted, '*This FTA has provisions that will undermine access to treatment, not just in India but across the developing world*'. Dutta's concerns are not unfounded. India is well recognised as the leading supplier of generic medicines across the developing world. Recent seizures at EU ports of such generic drug consignments are ample evidence of the adverse impacts of stringent provisions on intellectual property rights that are also likely to feature in the EU-India FTA. Several other colleagues living with HIV joined Dutta at the protest.

In response to the protest, the EU Ambassador Daniele Smadja met with three representatives from the Forum on FTAs, a platform of people's organisations that organized the protest. Dharmendra Kumar of India FDI Watch who met with the Ambassador said, '*We were disappointed but not surprised by the Ambassadors statement that all negotiating texts are secret and will not be made available even to EU Parliamentarians*'.

With a minimum of 90% tariff coverage, there will be little leeway for the Government of India to protect Indian agriculture. Speaking to the press, Yudhvir Singh from the Bharatiya Kisan Union stated '*It is shocking that EU subsidies are kept out of the negotiations and this will allow agribusiness in EU to dump subsidized products such as dairy into the country*'.

The Forum has submitted a memorandum to Minister Kamal Nath calling for a halt to the talks and has asked for a meeting with the Indian delegation. As the FTA negotiations gather speed, concern is spreading across the country. The Forum on FTAs has written to political parties across the spectrum to address this issue in their manifestos. This demand has been met positively showing growing skepticism with the FTA agenda.

People who were part of the protest include representatives from hawkers associations, networks of positive people and health, agriculture and labour groups.
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