

AHEAD OF ELECTION YEAR

UK team flies in to remove FTA hurdles



BLOOMBERG
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India and the UK have begun crunch-time talks to secure a landmark free-trade deal, as leaders on both sides seek to resolve outstanding issues before they face election battles next year.

A UK team — including Amanda Brooks, director general for trade negotiations, and Douglas McNeill, chief economic adviser to the prime minister — is in New Delhi this week for further talks, according to people familiar with the matter, who asked not to be identified because the discussions are private. It's the 13th round of negotiations on a deal intended to expand a trading relationship that was worth more than \$24 billion last year.

The UK Department for Business and Trade declined to comment on Monday. A spokesperson for India's trade ministry didn't respond to an email seeking further information.

PM Narendra Modi has a small window to clinch the deal between his big victory in state elections confirmed on Sunday and a nationwide vote next year. The trade deal, which has been under discussion for more than two years, would be India's most ambitious, underscoring the country's growing clout as the world's most populous nation and fastest-growing major economy.

The British premier, Rishi Sunak, is also looking for

TO EXPAND TRADE TIES

■ **UK's DG for trade negotiations Amanda Brooks, CEA to PM Douglas McNeill in New Delhi this week**

■ **It's the 13th round of negotiations**

■ **Indian govt has little time before nationwide vote next year**

■ **British PM Rishi Sunak also looking to crack the deal to make good on 2016 Brexit**

deeper ties to India to make good on the UK's 2016 decision to leave the European Union. The ruling Conservatives are currently trailing the opposition Labour Party by some 20 percentage points in public opinion polls and Sunak has so far struggled to get the UK's stagnant economy growing.

Officials on both sides have for weeks pointed to December as the best time to wrap up negotiations. While the parties have softened their stance on issues such as scotch whisky and visas for professionals, a handful of topics — ranging from tariffs on electric vehicles to post-study visas for students — continue to hold up a deal.