

India to push for social security pact at US trade meet

Move to protect interests of cross-border workers

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India will push hard for a social security agreement to protect the interests of cross-border workers and greater market access for fruits like mangoes in America during the Trade Policy Forum (TPF) meeting here on Friday, an official said.

The 14th India-US TPF will be co-chaired by Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and US Trade Representative (USTR) Katherine Tai, who is travelling to the national capital for the ministerial. The forum aims to strengthen and expand the bilateral economic and trade ties between the two nations. The ministerial is crucial, considering the US is India's largest trade and export partner. Bilateral merchandise trade during April-October stood at \$69.36 billion.

"The US had sought data regarding India's social security schemes. We have shared the data with them after discussions with various ministries, including the labour department," a senior government official said. Data pertaining to the Employees' Provident Fund (EPF), National Pension System (NPS) and Employees' State Insurance Corp. (ESIC) have been shared with the US government.

India now wants the US to take this forward and work towards a social security or totalisation agreement, a long-pending demand of India. The agreement will provide social security to Indian professionals in America and eliminate dual social security deductions, both in the home country and in the nation where an employee works. It will benefit Indians, particularly from the IT sector, who are working in America and paying social security but are unable to get any benefit out of it. These contributions



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India negotiating on 'double contribution treaty' with UK

India is pushing hard to sign a 'double contribution treaty' with the United Kingdom (UK), which will be a part of the proposed trade deal between both nations, a senior government official said.

The pact has been one of the key asks for India, considering that the UK is India's second largest service export destination after the United States. "Our argument is simple. An employee gets the benefit of the social security deposit, only when he/she ends up staying in the foreign country permanently. If an employee

is a temporary worker and goes to the UK for five years, then there will be double contribution in India and the UK," the official said. With a large number of information technology professionals working in the UK, such an agreement will protect the interests of skilled cross border workers. Without the pact, temporary skilled workers make non-refundable social security contributions in both countries. A reciprocal pact will bring down cost of operations for companies, increase employee's take home salary. **SHREYA NANDI**

are typically in the form of insurance or pension. According to industry estimates, Indian companies in the US incur a loss of \$4 billion on social security contributions.

The official said India will raise the issue related to faster inspection for Indian pharma products and getting quick approvals from the US FDA. "Other issues that will be taken up include ways to cut down the time to approve E1, E2, H-1B visas. We had raised this issue earlier, as well," the offi-

cial said.

The non-tariff barrier on fruits such as mangoes, grapes, pomegranates, and marine products like wild-caught fish and shrimps will also be taken up by Indian officials. Issues about increasing exports of table grapes, reinstating the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) status to India, and export control regulations for high-tech products and technologies will also reportedly be taken up.