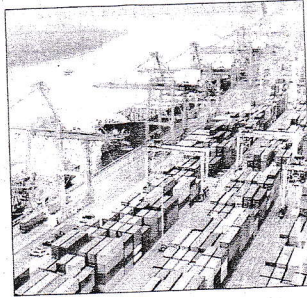


India, UK to resume FTA talks



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AFTER A BRIEF stalemate, a team of Indian officials will be in the UK this week to resume negotiations on the free trade agreement. The idea is to resolve a few pending issues and sew up the deal without any more delay, a senior official said Monday.

The visit of the Indian delegation comes a month after both sides decided to take a pause in negotiations when Indian elections were announced on March 15. At that time, the 14th round of negotiations were on.

"(The) team is going this week. Some of them have already gone. Our deputy chief negotiator is also now in the UK. There are very few pending issues now in the FTA," commerce secretary Sunil Barthwal said. He said the 14th round of negotiations will resume.

"Teams have made good progress and the majority of difficult issues are towards resolution," another official said while refusing to elaborate. "A couple of key priority issues to seal the deal are being ironed out to have a balanced outcome," he added.

India and the UK started negotiations on the free trade agreement in January 2022. Talks cover 26 chapters or policy areas such as intellectual property and rules of origin, apart from tariff reductions and market access. Along with the FTA, both the sides intend to sign a bilateral investment treaty (BIT).

On another key FTA that India is negotiating with the European Union, the official said the eighth round of negotiations is being planned for in May or June. The 7th round was held in February this year. Prior to the next round, officials from both sides will be meeting virtually for discussions on various policy areas.

India and the EU launched talks on FTA in June 2022. This FTA covers 23 policy areas or chapters. Both the UK and the EU are key trade partners for India. The UK is the sixth-biggest market for Indian exports. Among trading blocks, the EU is the biggest buyer of goods from India. It accounts for 17% of India's