

India-EU FTA talks in last leg

MUKESH JAGOTA
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THE NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN India and the European Union on the Free Trade Agreement is in the final stage where the toughest issues will get decided, a senior official said Wednesday.

"We are in the last leg of negotiations. The last leg is the most arduous leg of negotiations because these are the toughest things that are decided at the end. Progress in the last round has been very positive," commerce secretary Rajesh Agrawal told reporters.

Both sides just concluded their 14th round of talks on the FTA in Brussels last week and some officials have stayed back to conclude talks on the chapter of Rules of Origin (ROO).

"That (ROO) is one area where a lot of work needs to be done. So we have left the team there. It was planned to have the negotiations for two weeks at a

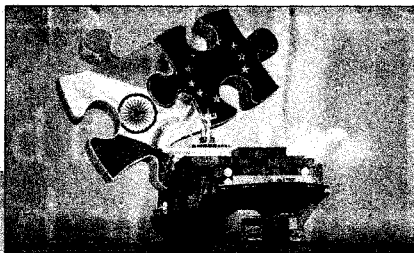
WORK IN PROGRESS

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■ Dates for the next formal round have not yet been finalised

■ Some officials from the EU are expected to visit New Delhi next month



stretch to see that we can make substantial progress," Agrawal told reporters.

He said the dates for the next formal round have not been finalised but discussions continue as there are issues around areas for which both sides need to be engaged on a

continuous basis.

"Instead of waiting for a round there are engagements that are going between the two sides virtually also," Agrawal said.

"India-EU negotiations are progressing very well. Chances are that it may get closed by

December," he added.

As talks intensify, some officials from the EU are expected to visit New Delhi next month to carry forward the discussions.

In the 14th round, the discussions were held on 12 policy areas of the FTA with a focus on key areas like market access for goods, service, rules of origin and technical barriers to trade among others.

Agrawal joined the discussions as the 14th round was winding down. He met Director General (Trade) of European Commission (EC) Sabine Weyand to assess progress and provide strategic guidance for addressing the remaining outstanding issues.

India and EU relaunched discussions on the FTA in June 2022. The proposed agreement covers 23 policy areas or chapters, including Trade in Goods, Trade in Services, Investment, Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, Technical Barriers to Trade, etc.