

‘No deadline for UK FTA but working on a timeline’

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New Delhi, 15 November

India and the UK are not working under any deadlines on the conclusion of negotiations on the free-trade agreement (FTA) as there are issues which are slightly complex in nature and of economic significance to both countries, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal said on Wednesday.

Responding to a query at a press briefing here on any tentative deadline to sign the pact between the two countries, he said that issues are being examined carefully in a roundwise manner and they are expected to finish soon. “We are not working under any deadlines. Though, there are internal timelines as such and round wise discussions happen there,” the commerce secretary said.

Till now, 13 rounds of negotiations have concluded on the issue and chief negotiators of India and the UK

are expected to soon hold the next round of talks.

The officials from the UK are expected to visit New Delhi for the negotiations.

Launched in January last year, the agreement was originally scheduled to conclude by Diwali (October 24, 2022), but the deadline was missed due to several adverse developments. Barthwal, in response to a question on India joining the trade pillar, also said that the finalisation of the trade pillar by the 14-member Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) is expected to take some more time, which gives New Delhi more time to track these negotiations.

“The finalisation of the trade pillar by the IPEF countries, where we have observer status, is expected to take some more time. The three pillars that we have already joined are getting finalised first. So, we have more elbow room to look at these negotiations and respond,” he added. The secretary also clarified that the labour component under the IPEF and said that harmonisation of regulations is expected under the supply chain pillar.

“We have agreed that the regulations will only be applicable as per the domestic labour laws. It is not beyond the domestic labour laws and it is a cooperative mechanism. There is no dispute resolution mechanism, where if an investor country

feels there is some inconsistency, then it will be bilaterally resolved under a cooperation mechanism,” Barthwal said.



SUNIL BARTHWAL, Commerce Secretary