

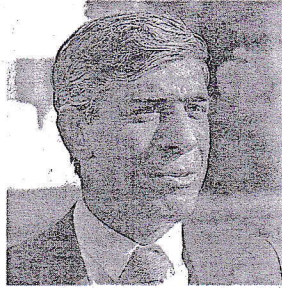
India-UK FTA: Cabinet Secretary chairs CoS meet to sort out contentious issues

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In a last-ditch effort to work out differences on the India-UK FTA before UK PM Rishi Sunak's proposed visit to India this month-end, the Cabinet Secretary chaired a meeting of Secretaries from key Ministries on Thursday to internally sort out the tricky areas holding back the pact, sources have said.

"In the Committee of Secretaries (CoS) meeting, an effort was made to find out the extent to which Indian negotiators could be flexible in the last-minute give and take going on in critical areas. India is trying its best to get the India-UK FTA finalised by the month-end," a source tracking the matter said.

Secretaries and senior officials from Ministries including Finance, Agriculture, Food Processing, Heavy Industries and Pharmaceuticals attended the meeting, the source added.



British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak is scheduled to be on a four-day visit to India at the end of this month AP.

Sunak is scheduled to be on a four-day visit to India at the end of this month and attempts are being made by both countries to create conditions for the proposed India-UK FTA to be announced during the tour.

TOUGH AREAS

The Commerce Department gave a presentation on the on-going negotiations at the Committee of Secretaries meeting, the source said.

The tough areas that need to be ironed out in-

clude rules of origin for processed food, automobiles and engineering goods, access for UK professional service providers in India, tariff cuts for key products such as Scotch whisky, cars and medical equipment, and work visa liberalisation for Indian workers.

"In some of the difficult areas, both sides are not prepared to give up their existing positions. Finally, the leaders may need to take a political call. But officials will continue to make efforts to bridge the gaps," the source said. The FTA, once implemented, is expected to double bilateral trade to \$100 billion by 2030.

Some reports in the British media have hinted that Sunak's visit to India could be tied to the possibility of the India-UK FTA being announced at that time.

While both governments have not yet officially announced the visit, officials have spoken off the record sharing various details of

Sunak's proposed trip to India.

No dates have, however, been officially announced by either the UK or India. The FTA is expected to double bilateral trade to \$100 billion by 2030.

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