

India's negotiators in London to push FTA talks

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India's negotiating team for the proposed India-UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA), led by Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal, will be in London this week to try and narrow differences on key issues in an attempt to seal the deal before the country's general elections, sources have said. "Senior officials from the

Commerce Ministry, including the Commerce Secretary, have left for London to take forward talks on the handful of issues where consensus has been elusive," a source told *businessline*.

Of the 26 chapters in the proposed negotiations, most of the chapters have been fully, or majorly, tied up, with just a few issues proving to be tricky. Although India may have agreed to steep import duty cuts for items such as Scotch and automobiles, there are in-

dications that the UK wants more market access. It also wants more access in legal services and financial services. New Delhi, too, is insisting on tangible "commercial gains" from the pact. Its demand for a more liberal non-immigrant visa regime for workers and a social security pact have not been satisfactorily met yet, sources said.

Earlier this month, a UK trade delegation led by Douglas McNeill, chief eco-

nomics advisor to UK PM Rishi Sunak, was in New Delhi, meeting top decision makers, including Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and senior officials in the Prime Minister's Office, looking for possible breakthrough.

The two countries are optimistic about bilateral trade doubling to \$100 billion by 2030 if the FTA is implemented soon.