

India & UK 'very close' to free trade pact after years of delays

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INDIA AND THE UK are "very close" to agreeing a long-awaited free trade agreement just weeks after the two countries restarted talks, a senior Indian diplomat said.

"We are very close, and this agreement is going to be a game-changer for both of us," Nidhi Tripathi, economic minister in India's High Commission in London, told delegates at the British Chambers of Commerce trade conference in London on Thursday.

"This will bring a lot of predictability and certainty for our services suppliers, and we are very hopeful."

A spokesperson for the UK's department for business and trade declined to comment on the progress of the deal.

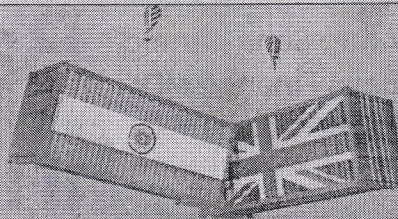
Tripathi's remarks suggest envoys are finally homing in on a trade deal between the two nations more than three years after the dialogue was launched under Britain's then Prime Minis-

CUT A DEAL

■ Envoys may finally homing in on a trade deal between India & UK

■ The dialogue was started was launched under Britain's then PM Boris Johnson in 2022

■ UK's trade secretary, Jonathan Reynolds, travelled to India last month to restart the talks



■ Reynolds appeared to genuinely get along with his counterpart Piyush Goyal

■ The two countries have held more than a dozen rounds of talks since January 2022

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The new Labour government's business and trade secretary, Jonathan Reynolds, travelled to India last month to restart the talks, which had been paused in 2024 due to elections in both the UK and India.

One UK official close to the negotiations said in the aftermath of the visit that progress on the talks was more positive than they could remember at any point in the past. That was helped along by the fact

that Reynolds appeared to genuinely get along with his counterpart Piyush Goyal, the official added.

The two countries have held more than a dozen rounds of talks since they began in January 2022, and several self-imposed deadlines to conclude the negotiations were missed by Johnson and his successor Rishi Sunak, who had hoped to sign a deal before last July's general election in the UK.

—BLOOMBERG