

Modi may sign FTA during UK visit this week

PM to also visit Maldives while returning

ARCHIS MOHAN

New Delhi, 20 July

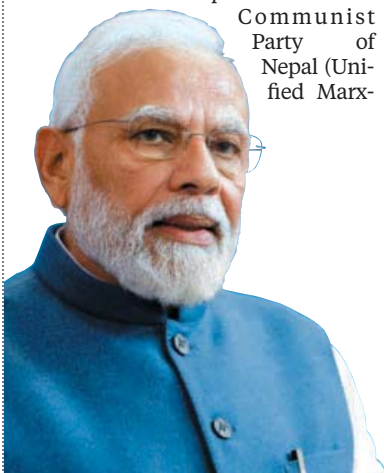
Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day visit to the United Kingdom (UK) on July 23-24 will focus on increasing bilateral trade, and the signing of the India-UK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in London on Thursday. The PM will also visit the Maldives while returning from the UK.

In a statement, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said Modi will hold wide-ranging talks with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, and the two sides will review the progress of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP). Its specific focus, the MEA said, would be on trade and economy, technology and innovation, defence and security, climate, health, education, and people-to-people ties. Modi is also expected to call on King Charles during his fourth visit as PM to the UK.

In the second leg of his visit, the PM will be in the Maldives on July 25 and 26. This will be his third visit to the Maldives, and the first visit by a foreign head of state or government to Maldives during the presidency of Mohamed Muizzu.

The two leaders will take stock of the progress in the implementation of the India-Maldives Joint Vision for a 'Comprehensive Economic and Maritime Security Partnership', adopted during Muizzu's state visit to India in October 2024.

In Kathmandu, Nepal's foreign ministry said on Sunday that Nepal Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli will pay an official visit to India towards mid-September, a two-day visit starting on September 16. Oli, the chairperson of the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marx-



LatAm trade talks: India wary of China factor

SHREYA NANDI

New Delhi, 20 July

As India prepares for trade negotiations with Chile, Peru, and the Mercosur bloc, officials in New Delhi are approaching the discussions with caution, amid China's growing influence in Latin America and suspicious market access in the past.

"We need to have strong firewalls and need to be very careful. We don't want a repeat of what happened in the case of India's trade deal with Association of SouthEast Asian Nations (Asean) or United Arab Emirates to some extent," a senior government official told *Business Standard*.

India's concerns stem from China's rising presence in South America. China is among the top trade partners and a key source of foreign direct investment in the region. Already, in the case of the over a decade-old agreement with Asean, New Delhi has been worried about China using loopholes in the deal to route goods to India through the trade bloc.

For instance, during previous rounds of negotiations, Peru had sought tariff concessions and greater market access for products it did not manufacture.

However, free trade agreements with Latin American countries is a part of India's strategy to not only diversify trade partnership amid rising geopolitical polarisation, but also secure critical mineral supplies from the region.

Government officials are set to hold virtual talks with their counterparts from the bloc later this week.

"We want to understand whether they (the bloc) want a further expansion of the PTA (preferential trade agreement) to add more tariff lines or have a comprehensive trade agreement," the senior official said.

ist-Leninist), assumed the office of prime minister for the fourth time last July. He had opted to visit China for his maiden foreign outing, breaking the tradition of visiting India as the first destination after assuming the post of prime minister.