

Goyal may visit Canada in Feb to resume FTA talks

SHREYA NANDI

New Delhi, 26 December

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal may travel to Canada in February to resume free-trade agreement (FTA) negotiations between the two countries, according to people aware of the matter.

Last week, chief negotiators from both sides held virtual discussions to find a way forward on the proposed Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (Cepa). The objective of the meeting was to design the agenda and chart the path ahead for the talks.

After a gap of more than two years amid a tumultuous bilateral relationship, India and Canada in November finalised a broad framework and agreed to restart negotiations for a comprehensive

trade deal.

Talks for the agreement are expected to begin “afresh”, and there will be a lot of emphasis on reducing tariff and non-tariff barriers, according to one of the people cited above. There could also be discussions on ways to increase investments in both countries. However, a bilateral investment treaty (BIT) for investor protection may not be prioritised at this stage.

“In two years, countries have moved on, the world has moved on. A lot of other chal-

lenges in trade are coming up. We need to take stock as to where we stopped....” commerce secretary Rajesh Agrawal had said last week.

In March 2022, India and Canada formally re-launched talks for a comprehensive trade deal to create new opportunities for boosting trade and investment flows. It was also decided that an early progress trade agreement (Epta) would serve as a transitional step towards a Cepa.

However, negotiations were stalled more than two years ago as ties between India and Canada plummeted to an all-time low following a diplomatic spat over the killing of Khalistani separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar in June 2023. Then Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau alleged a potential Indian link to the killing, claims that New Delhi categorically rejected. At the time, negotiations were at an advanced stage, and both sides had hoped to finalise the deal by the end of 2023.

