

UK free trade talks on track

Mumbai: Amid a diplomatic row following protests by secessionist groups near the Indian mission in London, Union commerce minister Piyush Goyal on Thursday said talks on a free trade agreement with the UK are continuing.

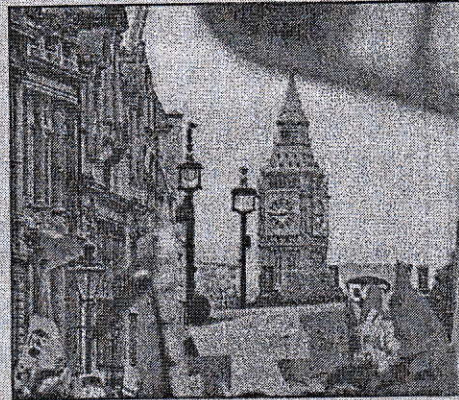
Talks are "going on very well" with the UK, Goyal said, adding, "trade stands on its own legs".

The Union minister, however, made it clear that India will take into consideration respect for her sovereignty and territorial integrity, and will not tolerate any interference in her Indian affairs.

India's ministry of external affairs summoned the senior-most British diplomat in New Delhi on a Sunday evening recently, over reports of some Khalistani elements pulling down the Indian flag at the Indian high commission in London during a protest.

India has also responded by proposing or undertaking several actions, such as reducing security at the British mission and constructing a public toilet there.

When asked about the impact of the ongoing events on the trade agreement, Goyal seemed to suggest that negoti-



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ations will continue.

"I can assure you that talks are going on very well with the UK, Canada, with the EU countries, we are also in dialogue with Israel," he told reporters here.

Goyal said there was no deadline to have an FTA with the UK, but a former PM of the country had announced an aspiration to conclude before Diwali of 2022.

"...we are back at the negotiating table, both sides are discussing at the official level," he said.

Goyal said there is a high interest for FTAs with India shown by many countries, and discussions are on at a "frenzied pace" with many countries, and quipped that he is not left with bandwidth to discuss such agreements. PTI