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## India-UK Trade Agreement Set to Be Signed During Modi Visit as Strategic Ties Expand

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit the United Kingdom and the Maldives this week, with the finalisation of a long-awaited Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and the UK expected to be the key highlight of his UK leg. Scheduled from July 23 to 26, the visit underscores India's increasing assertiveness on the global trade stage and is aimed at reinforcing strategic partnerships.

According to the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), Modi will meet UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer on July 23 and 24 for comprehensive discussions on bilateral cooperation. While the official line refers to “wide-ranging talks” covering trade, defence, innovation, and people-to-people ties, the FTA will likely take centre stage as a deal that has been years in the making.

First agreed in principle earlier this year, the FTA promises significant economic gains for both nations. It is expected to remove tariffs on 99% of Indian exports to the UK, while British industries such as automotive and spirits are set to benefit from improved access to the Indian market. Commentators have noted that while the current UK government is keen to showcase this as a foreign policy success, the real credit belongs to negotiators who laid the groundwork under the previous administration.

This will be Modi’s fourth visit to Britain, and his first since the change in Downing Street last year. The two leaders have previously met on the sidelines of global summits, but this official visit is expected to mark a turning point in Indo-UK economic relations, especially as Britain seeks fresh trading opportunities post-Brexit.

Modi is also scheduled to call on His Majesty King Charles III during his stay.

In the second leg of his journey, Prime Minister Modi will travel to the Maldives from July 25 to 26, where he will be the Guest of Honour at the country’s Independence Day celebrations. This marks his first visit to the archipelago nation since President Mohamed Muizzu assumed office in 2023.

Modi’s presence at the celebrations signals a notable thaw in what had been tense relations. President Muizzu, seen as adopting a more nationalist stance upon taking office, initially requested the withdrawal of Indian military personnel linked to aviation support missions. Since then, however, both nations have taken steps to repair ties, with Modi’s upcoming visit viewed as a move to solidify the reset.

In a statement, the MEA confirmed that the two leaders will review the progress of their “Comprehensive Economic and Maritime Security Partnership”, agreed during Muizzu’s visit to India last October. Discussions are expected to touch on maritime cooperation, regional security, and development initiatives.

The Maldives continues to be a key part of India's "Neighbourhood First" policy and the broader maritime vision known as MAHASAGAR. Modi's visit reaffirms New Delhi's commitment to regional influence amid growing competition from other powers seeking strategic access to the Indian Ocean.

While the visit to London may offer headline economic announcements, the stop in Malé serves as a reminder that regional diplomacy remains crucial to India's long-term strategy.