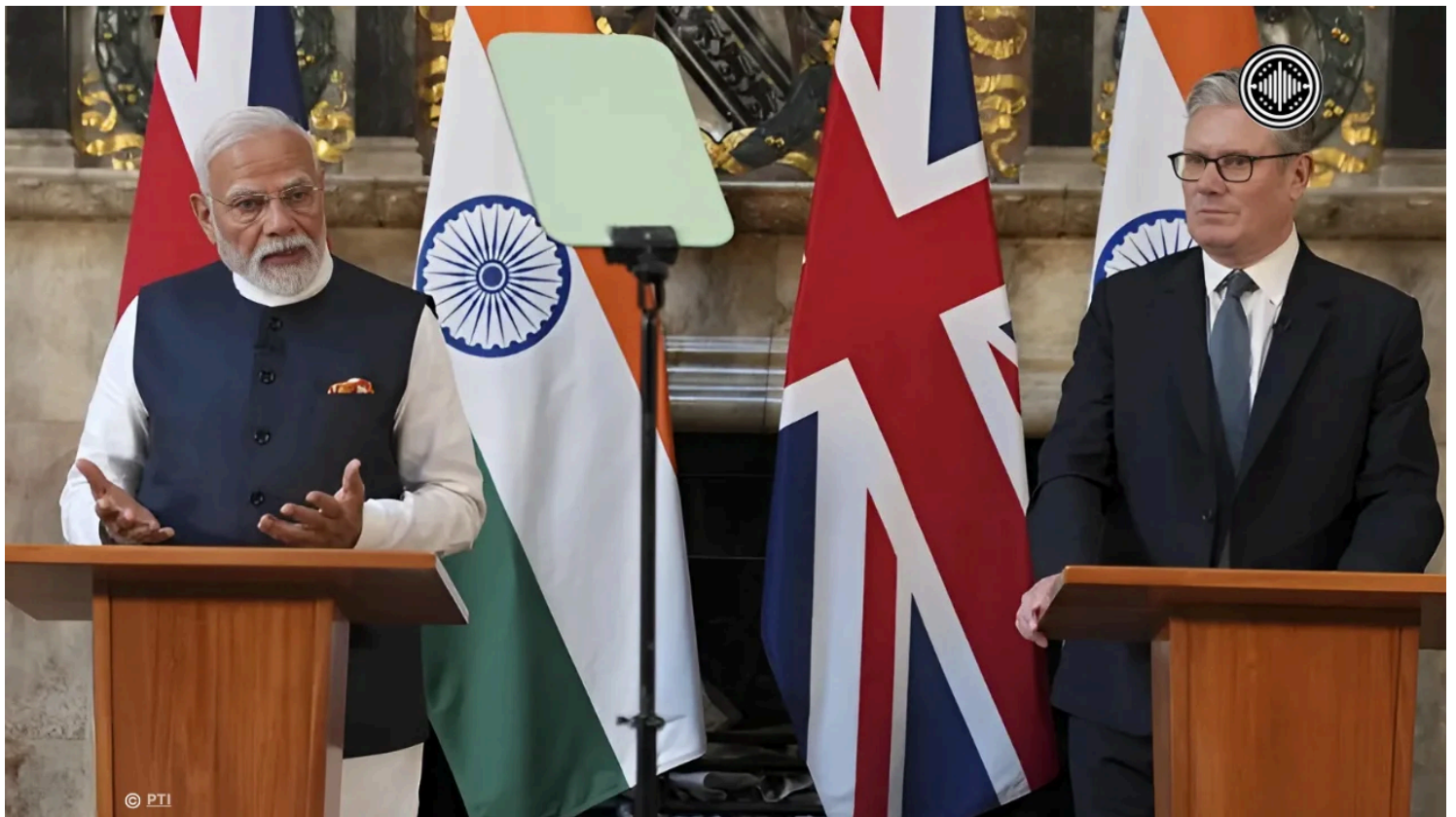


India–UK Trade Deal to Grant 1,800 Annual Visas for Skilled Indian Professionals

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The recently signed India–United Kingdom Free Trade Agreement (FTA), concluded on 25 July 2025, introduces provisions that will allow up to 1,800 Indian professionals to obtain UK work visas each year. Targeted at niche service providers such as chefs, yoga instructors, and classical musicians, the FTA aims to enhance skilled labour mobility between the two nations while fostering deeper bilateral economic ties.

Under the agreement, Indian nationals can work in the UK for up to two years across 35 different service sectors, which include fields like architecture, engineering, law, education, finance, and digital trade. The arrangement applies specifically to contractual service suppliers, independent professionals, and business visitors. According to India's Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal, the deal is expected to simplify visa procedures and create new opportunities for highly specialised Indian talent in the UK job market.

Beyond individual mobility, the FTA also secures commercial presence rights referred to under international trade law as Mode 3, in key sectors such as consultancy, computer services, and environmental services. This provision allows Indian companies to establish a physical presence in the UK market, enhancing their access and investment potential. Crucially, the agreement ensures that there are no numerical restrictions on UK service suppliers operating in India under these arrangements.

However, while the FTA has made notable progress in facilitating professional movement, the UK's concessions on labour mobility are limited in scope. There are no binding commitments related to Information Technology (IT) professionals, nor does the agreement expand post-study work opportunities for Indian graduates. Indian applicants must still qualify under the existing points-based immigration system, meeting standard requirements for education, salary, and job offers.

India has agreed to limited mutual recognition of UK professional qualifications in select sectors, including law and accounting. Nevertheless, it has preserved regulatory autonomy in sensitive domains such as legal services, taxation, and national security. These carve-outs are seen as necessary to maintain domestic oversight while enabling selective collaboration.

Industry stakeholders have welcomed the FTA as a progressive move towards acknowledging India's growing professional capabilities on a global stage. Yet, many caution that realising the full benefit of the agreement will depend on ongoing efforts to develop cultural competencies, compliance systems, and advanced skill training among Indian service providers seeking to enter the UK market.

The agreement represents a carefully negotiated balance between open market access and national regulatory safeguards. While incremental, it reflects a shared intent by both

governments to strengthen strategic economic cooperation and expand the role of skilled services in their bilateral trade relationship.