

NATIONAL

India-EU trade talks to resume by December

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India-EU connectivity partnership a ‘counterfoil’ to other such initiatives, says official



After an eight year hiatus, India and the European Union (EU) are set to resume negotiations for a Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA) by December, according to a Government official. Another official termed the **India-EU connectivity partnership**, announced in May, as a “counterfoil” to other such initiatives in an indirect reference to China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

“**India-EU trade talks** are set to start anytime by end of the year... We have prioritised and discussions will now go forward. It will be comprehensive talks,” the official said on the sidelines of a report launch on Thursday.

At the India-EU summit in May this year, the two sides had agreed to resume talks for BTIA that were suspended in 2013 and also adopted a Connectivity Partnership document outlining plans to cooperate on digital and infrastructure projects.

“When we were negotiating this document, one thing which was there in the back of our minds... was that we want to make it a counterfoil or an alternative to some existing connectivity initiatives.... We

He was speaking at the launch of the report 'India-EU Connectivity: Partnership for Development, Demand and Democracy' organised by the think tank Research and Information System (RIS) for Developing Countries.

"Emphasis on our values, inclusiveness and transparency, local environment, avoiding debt trap... These may not find mention in the partnership but they were part of our discussions and we have been careful to infuse elements of it..." Mr. Chakravorty said in an indirect reference to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) which has come under criticism for creating debt traps on smaller countries. "The two important elements that reflect that spirit are private sector involvement and people to people connectivity," he stated.

Negotiations for a similar pact with UK are expected to kick off from November 1, with both sides looking forward to firming up offers for an early harvest pact by the end of this month. India and UK have set a March 2022 target for an interim trade agreement to be concluded, setting the stage for a broader pact later. In this regard, the official cited earlier said India-UK talks will begin before the India-EU talks.

On the connectivity roadmap, Mr. Chakravorty said the focus areas were connectivity within the country, building connectivity with Europe and in that process work other countries in South Asia and so on, also working with third countries, trade agreements, climate change and Info-Pacific. Stating that the priority is trade agreements, he said that they are also working on secure supply chains. "There is reciprocal interest," he added.

Giving an overview of the report, Prof. Sachin Chaturvedi, Director General, RIS said the report is based on the India-EU connectivity roadmap and the report covers three main areas – trade and investment, science and technology and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). "It covers the broad contours of connectivity linkages and its various forms along with trade and investment linkages and also tries to explore a roadmap for effective implementation of Agenda 2030," he said.

Speaking at the event Ambassador, Delegation of the EU to India and Bhutan, Ugo Astuto, said connectivity covers not only physical infrastructure but also the regulatory framework which is very important. Stressing on the principles underpinning connectivity, he said it needs to be grounded on democracy and rule of law.

He said that it is their view to leverage the European Investment Bank (EIB) for the connectivity which is already financing a series of projects and metro networks across the country including Bengaluru, Kanpur and Lucknow.

As a part of the steps to implement the roadmap, there would be stakeholder workshops to identify specific projects and a forum in 2022 to finalise them, officials added.

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