# Goyal and Reynolds defend controversial NI exemption as UK‑India trade deal faces scrutiny



On the opening day of the India Global Forum London 2025, India’s Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal, and the UK’s Secretary of State for Business and Trade, Jonathan Reynolds, mounted a united defence of the UK–India Free Trade Agreement (FTA), signalling the first high‑profile public rebuttal of criticism surrounding the three‑year national insurance exemption for Indian workers temporarily posted to Britain. The session, held at the Queen Elizabeth II Centre, underscored a shared conviction that the deal represents a pragmatic, mutually beneficial framework for business mobility and trade. According to the announcement, Goyal argued that domestic voters and businesses alike would benefit from the arrangement, calling it a “win–win for mobility and trade” and noting that similar arrangements exist in other countries. Reynolds, for his part, asserted that no British worker would be undercut and that mobility and access to services have improved as a result of the agreement. The event, part of a three‑day forum featuring around 100 speakers and 1,000 participants, was framed as a tangible signal of bilateral resolve and future‑oriented collaboration.

Background and context have since sharpened the picture of what the FTA entails. The deal is designed to slash tariffs on a wide range of goods and to broaden access for UK services into India, while granting India enhanced protections and predictability in a bilateral framework that also covers rules of origin and modernised trade remedies. Reports from Reuters highlighted a three‑year exemption from UK national insurance contributions for Indian workers temporarily posted to Britain, paired with reciprocal relief for UK employees in India, under what has been described as the Double Contribution Convention. The coverage extends beyond tariffs to include services mobility and procurement access, reflecting a broad, sector‑spanning vision for the partnership. In parallel coverage, outlets noted that whisky, autos and cosmetics stand to benefit prominently from tariff reductions, with Indian access to UK goods and services expanding in important sectors on both sides. The FT and Al Jazeera analyses have framed the package as a well‑telegraphed equilibrium—while tariffs are cut and mobility is expanded, some sensitive sectors remain constrained or subject to careful management. The Guardian, for its part, quoted lawmakers expressing concern that the concessions could negatively affect British workers, even as officials and backers emphasised stability and long‑term growth. Taken together, the reporting sketches a nuanced landscape: a landmark agreement with concrete economic potential, yet accompanied by political debate about its social and labour-market implications.

Critics and supporters alike have weighed in on how the national‑insurance exemption sits within the broader deal. On the one hand, critics warn that even temporary exemptions can exert competitive pressure on UK workers and public services, a line echoed by certain MPs and commentators highlighted by coverage in the Guardian. Proponents reject this framing, arguing that the agreement preserves mobility and business certainty without altering immigration policy, and that the package delivers stability, predictability and growth across a wide range of sectors. The Financial Times has stressed that, while the deal prioritises goods with hopes of improved professional mobility and mutual recognition, it simultaneously recognises the need to protect sensitive sectors. Al Jazeera has canvassed the negotiations’ potential to lift both economies, while flagging ongoing discussions on investment, labour standards and protections. In short, the public conversation around the NI exemption sits at the intersection of industrial strategy, labour markets, and political accountability, with multiple outlets presenting convergent, but not identical, readings of the same package.

The India Global Forum London itself has framed the partnership as a forward‑looking alliance grounded in three engines of growth—technology, talent and capital. Manoj Ladwa, founder and chairman of the forum, described the event as a nexus for “outcome‑driven, measurable and future‑focused” collaborations that connect Global Britain with Global India in practical, transformative ways. The forum’s opening sessions mapped out ambitions across AI, energy transition, healthtech, geopolitics and the creative economy, underscoring a leadership narrative that sees the FTA as a catalyst for broader cooperation, beyond tariff schedules alone. While the rhetoric remains aspirational, the practical parts of the agreement—tariff liberalisation, service access, and mobility mechanisms—are now being scrutinised in parliaments and think tanks as the two governments implement what they describe as a difficult but rewarding compromise.

As the three‑year window for the insurance exemption unfolds, observers will be watching how the arrangement translates into real‑world outcomes for workers, firms and public policy. Reuters has framed the latter months as a test of how the deal will influence investment, job creation and export trajectories, while Guardian and FT commentary continues to dissect the political economy of the concessions. In the near term, industry data shows that tariff reductions across textiles, electronics and consumer goods, coupled with enhanced mobility, could unlock new supply‑chain opportunities and strengthen bilateral trade flows. Yet the debate over protection for domestic workers persists, ensuring that the UK–India relationship remains both a diplomatic achievement and a live policy question for months to come.

Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://news.google.com/rss/articles/CBMijgJBVV95cUxQS014ZlZiOVJudmI0VVM0V29iUlR1Ni1KQnQ5NHFrU3A4T2UxMVFjcm82ZjVKYWpiZW1oSDFib1N2ampYN2dNM0llV1hCelNmQ09RMExjWEg1YkxLNmt3RVV1T1pLUkJHVVp5VzhkZXBHTG9vLUt5clZoeWE4UWdhdkl6N2dyUUZYRFY3ZnE3dWk4NDV3dFhsTGNxV1V5UmxqdXFiSWgxXzVSMHdXZHFxcWxMWnR5Qi1jUHhtWkROU2M5QTg1TlpRTEt2dzJrSm5zNUpTWW5nNEZKTG9WU2hsNFpYWFB3bS1PQTFYbG14UWNWbFJEb1gxeEJtSS16dkNLWW4wa0ZldHBCWUZ1UHfSAY4CQVVfeXFMUEtNeGZWYjlSbnZiNFVTNFdvYlJUdTYtSkJ0OTRxa1NwOE9lMTFRY3JvNmY1SmFqYmVtaEgxYm9TdmpqWDdnTTNJZVdYQnpTZkNPUTBMY1hINWJMSzZrd0VVdU9aS1JCR1VaeVc4ZGVwR0xvby1LeXJWaHlhOFFnYXZJejdnclFGWERWN2ZxN3VpODQ1d3RYbExjcVdVeVJsanVxYkloMV81UjB3V2RxcXFsTFp0eUItY1B4bVpETlNjOUE4NU5aUUxLdncya0puczVKU1luZzRGSkxvVlNobDRaWFhQd20tT0ExWGxteFFjVmxSRG9YMXhCbUktenZDS1luMGtGZXRwQllGdVB3?oc=5&hl=en-US&gl=US&ceid=US:en), [[7]](https://www.prnewswire.com/in/news-releases/this-partnership-is-a-good-marriage---piyush-goyal-kicks-off-igf-london-2025-with-uk-trade-secretary-jonathan-reynolds-302485827.html)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/key-wins-uk-india-trade-deal-investments-jobs-exports-2025-07-24/), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/india-uk-sign-free-trade-deal-during-modis-visit-cut-tariffs-whisky-garments-2025-07-23/), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/06/uk-and-india-agree-trade-deal-after-three-years-of-negotiations), [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/c5e719ce-7c9b-4a4d-afb8-0383eaee1729), [[6]](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/5/6/india-uk-agree-historic-trade-deal-including-tariff-cuts)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/06/uk-and-india-agree-trade-deal-after-three-years-of-negotiations), [[5]](https://www.ft.com/content/c5e719ce-7c9b-4a4d-afb8-0383eaee1729), [[6]](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/5/6/india-uk-agree-historic-trade-deal-including-tariff-cuts)
* Paragraph 4 – [[7]](https://www.prnewswire.com/in/news-releases/this-partnership-is-a-good-marriage---piyush-goyal-kicks-off-igf-london-2025-with-uk-trade-secretary-jonathan-reynolds-302485827.html)
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2. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/key-wins-uk-india-trade-deal-investments-jobs-exports-2025-07-24/> - Britain and India have finalised a landmark free trade agreement aimed at boosting bilateral trade, investment and jobs. The deal cuts tariffs on a wide range of goods, with British whisky, autos and cosmetics among prominent beneficiaries, and opens Indian markets to UK services while preserving sensitive sectors. The agreement also foresees a three-year exemption from UK national insurance contributions for Indian workers temporarily posted to Britain, and reciprocal relief for UK employees in India, a provision known as the Double Contribution Convention. Services mobility, procurement access, and a criminal records sharing framework are among the features highlighted by officials.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/world/uk/india-uk-sign-free-trade-deal-during-modis-visit-cut-tariffs-whisky-garments-2025-07-23/> - India and the United Kingdom are poised to sign a comprehensive free trade agreement during Prime Minister Modi’s visit, signalling a long‑awaited reset in post‑Brexit relations. The pact promises wide tariff reductions across both economies, with UK imports from India enjoying access across textiles, garments, electronics and consumer goods, while Indian tariffs on a broad swath of UK exports including whisky, cars and cosmetics are slashed. The deal also includes a three‑year national insurance exemption for Indian workers temporarily posted in Britain and reciprocal arrangements for UK employees in India, together with commitments on rules of origin and modernised trade remedies.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2025/may/06/uk-and-india-agree-trade-deal-after-three-years-of-negotiations> - Britain and India have agreed a long‑desired trade deal, cutting tariffs and promising to boost the UK economy by around £4.8bn a year by 2040. The agreement also contains a controversial national insurance exemption for Indian workers seconded to the UK for three years, a reciprocal provision for UK staff in India and a window for temporary service mobility. The plan has provoked criticism from some MPs who warn it could undermine British workers, while supporters argue it protects mobility and jobs. Officials emphasise that the package does not alter immigration policy but expands business‑to‑business cooperation across multiple sectors nationwide.
5. <https://www.ft.com/content/c5e719ce-7c9b-4a4d-afb8-0383eaee1729> - The UK‑India free trade agreement is designed to broaden bilateral trade, with tariffs on UK exports to India largely removed and Indian duties on UK goods substantially cut over time. The deal places emphasis on goods, while services access improves modestly, with professional mobility and mutual recognition provisions, but sensitive sectors remain constrained. A familiar point of debate centres on the national insurance exemption for Indian ICT workers posted to the UK for up to three years, which critics warn could disadvantage British workers. Proponents counter that the package delivers stability, predictability and growth without undermining essential public services either.
6. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/5/6/india-uk-agree-historic-trade-deal-including-tariff-cuts> - Al Jazeera reports that India and the UK have agreed a historic trade deal featuring broad tariff reductions across major sectors, including whisky, cosmetics and cars, alongside a reciprocal package of service‑sector access. The British government says the agreement could add billions to the economies and lift wages. Central to the package is the Double Contribution Convention, which exempts Indian workers in the UK from UK social security payments for up to three years, with a mirrored provision for UK workers in India. Negotiations also cover rules of origin and future talks on investment and labour standards and protections.
7. <https://www.prnewswire.com/in/news-releases/this-partnership-is-a-good-marriage---piyush-goyal-kicks-off-igf-london-2025-with-uk-trade-secretary-jonathan-reynolds-302485827.html> - On the opening day of India Global Forum London 2025, Piyush Goyal and UK Business Secretary Jonathan Reynolds defended the UK‑India Free Trade Agreement amid criticism of the national insurance exemption for Indian workers posted to Britain. The session at the Queen Elizabeth II Centre framed the deal as stabilising mobility and trade, with speakers emphasising collaboration across technology, talent and capital. Industry leaders and forum founder Manoj Ladwa described the partnership as strategic and future-facing. The event featured around 100 speakers and 1,000 participants, highlighting discussions on AI, energy, healthtech and the creative economy alongside trade issues for all.