

Kamal Nath great negotiator but opposed liberalisation: Mandelson

British Business Secretary Peter Mandelson says former commerce and industry minister Kamal Nath was a 'great negotiator' but wouldn't budge on opening up the Indian market.

In his first public comments since the formation of the new Indian government in May, Mandelson said Friday that negotiating with major economies such as India in world trade talks was one of his main mandates as the European Union's Trade Commissioner.

'In India's case it wasn't always easy. I was constantly struggling with my counterpart in India, Kamal Nath,' said Mandelson, whose public joustings with his Indian counterpart became the media highlights of the long-running global trade talks that ended inconclusively last year.

'He is a great negotiator, amongst other things,' Mandelson told a meeting organised by the lobby group Labour Friends of India in London Friday.

'He is a great negotiator on behalf of his country and it wasn't always easy to win the argument that India will benefit by liberalising, by opening up and accelerating that great process that Rajiv Gandhi had started in the 80s and early 1990s,' Mandelson said.

Kamal Nath was appointed minister for road transport and highways in the new council of ministers. Anand Sharma, who served as minister of state for external affairs in the previous government, is the new commerce and industry minister.

Mandelson presented the Labour Friends of India's Fenner Brockway medal to former prime minister Tony Blair for his contributions to Britain-India relations.

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