

Federal Secretary Commerce Salman Ghani Visit LCCI

The European Union has finally agreed to initiate talks on Free Trade Agreement with Pakistan and the first round of negotiations would be held in February 2010. This was stated by the Federal Secretary Commerce Salman Ghani while speaking at the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry on Saturday. LCCI President Zafar Iqbal Chaudhry, Senior Vice President Ejaz A Mumtaz, former Presidents Iftikhar Ali Malik, Mian Misbahur Rehman and Mian Shafqat Ali also spoke on the occasion. The Federal Secretary said that it was a big achievement and result of hectic efforts on the part of the government that would help pave way for a duty free access to European Union. He said that he had a strong hope that in two years time the Free Trade Agreement with the European Union would be finalised. Salman Ghani also informed the business community of Lahore that the United States was more interested in Reconstruction Opportunity Zones than Free Market Access. On Afghan Transit Trade, the Federal Secretary said that two rounds of talks had already been completed and the private sector would be taken onboard for the removal of their apprehensions regarding smuggling. He said that the Government was convinced that the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry was supplementing its efforts for the economic well being of the country and in the trade policy all the eight proposals forwarded by the LCCI had been incorporated. The Federal Secretary also assured the LCCI President of his full support regarding the LCCI Business Census of Lahore as the fact remains that correct data would help pave way for sector specific decision making. Speaking on the occasion, the LCCI President Zafar Iqbal Chaudhry discussed in detail the idea of Business Census of Lahore. He said that the proposed Business Census would help strengthen government database that was a need of the hour. He said that the government should continue to strengthen further its liaison with business community, which would help in creating better understanding between the stakeholders and provide them much needed opportunity to get instant feedback on issues of vital national importance. He said that recent visit of Hillary Clinton to Pakistan was being termed as a successful visit in the government circles. The fact, he said, was that during her meetings with high government officials and media personnel, she has not directly assured of any MoU signing or any trade agreement with Pakistan. The LCCI President said that today, country is passing through the most critical times of its history. He said that Pakistan need direct market access to United States and European Union. The European Union is Pakistan's largest trading partner and is being proactively pursued for greater market access. He said it was a good omen that the European Union has expressed willingness to discuss free trade agreement (FTA) with Pakistan. He said that the meeting, which should have soon been held, is now expected to be held by the middle of next year. He urged upon the Commerce Minister to find immediate solutions to economic problems. Zafar Iqbal Chaudhry said that energy shortage has practically pushed industry to the wall and if timely step were not taken situation would go out of control. He suggested that government should seek the foreign expertise in the small hydro units and alternative energy units, as Pakistani market urgently needs to develop and upgrade this sector. "If this is positively done, most of the existing problems will be resolved", he added.

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