

Indian diplomat assures addressing traders concerns over MFN status

Indian High Commissioner in Pakistan Sharat Sabharwal has said that the business community concerns regarding MFN to India will be addressed fully and in this regard a team of Indian experts is visiting Pakistan in the first quarter of 2012 to discuss Non-Tariff Barriers. The Indian High Commissioner was speaking at the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry on Thursday. The LCCI President Irfan Qaiser Sheikh presented the Address of Welcome while Senior Vice President Kashif Younis Meher and Vice President Saeeda Nazar also gave their point of view on trade with India while SAARC Chamber Vice President Iftikhar Ali Malik, LCCI former Presidents Shahzada Alam Monoo, Mian Tajammal Hussain,

Mian Anjum Nisar, former KCCI President Qaiser Ahmad Sheikh, former Senior Vice Presidents Abdul Basit, Sohail Lashari, Former Vice Presidents Aftab Ahmad Vohra and Shafqat Saeed Piracha also spoke on the occasion. The High Commissioner said that the post MFN agreement implications are under active consideration between concerned authorities of both countries. He said that customs coordination between the two countries is being worked out to sort out all customs procedures related issues saying that the bottomline for present Indian regime is to promote trade between Pakistan and India in the larger interests of the people of two countries. He said India was making efforts to resolve the visa problems for Pakistani business community and multiple visa for one year will be issued to businessmen under visa liberalization policy by the Indian High Commission.

The draft of said visa policy is likely to be approved by Indian government, he added. He further said that at present the visas are granted under the 1974 visa policy of India. However, the frequent travellers visiting under business visa are exempted from the police reporting. He said Pakistani business community had showed a positive response for promoting trade with India and Indian government also made strenuous efforts for increasing the bilateral trade volume from \$2 billion to \$6 billion plus. Sharat Sabharwal pointed out that a separate gate and other facilities were being established at the Wahgah/Atary border for handling of export cargo 12 hours daily. The establishment of a separate gate would also be provided hurdle-free transportation facilities at the border, he added. Sharat Sabharwal disclosed that a well-equipped check post worth Rs 1.5 billion had been established at the Pak-India border which will facilitate the bilateral trade between the countries.

He said that the bilateral trade was on top of the agenda and Indian experts will help overcome energy crisis in Pakistan. Indian and Pakistani business communities are willing to promote economic and trade relations with the idea of enhancing the volume of bilateral trade between the two neighbouring countries for peace and to end poverty," he added. In his Address of Welcome, the LCCI President Irfan Qaiser Sheikh said that the earliest removal of Non Tariff Barriers will largely consolidate the business community efforts as most of the businessmen are not fully aware of Indian standards and quality parameters which also vary from city to city. The Pakistani exporters have to spend so much time and money to obtain certain certifications and fulfill the requirement of clearing but still they somehow fall

short of conforming to any particular condition. He said that there are numerous conditions for getting the shipments cleared which include agriculture permits, phyto-sanitary certificates, Indian standard of quality, licensing requirement for import of vehicles, textile specific barriers, health and safety regulations and many more. It is hoped that this area will be taken care of in near future by the Indian government with special preference given to Pakistan. He said that it can be said without a doubt that the potential gains from increased economic integration between India and Pakistan are large. Trade between the two countries is unnaturally small and the scope for gains from increased trade correspondingly large. It goes without saying that due to tight visa policy, the bilateral trade between India and Pakistan has remained undersized and averaging around US\$ 1.7 billion over the past 3 years through regular channels. Whereas overall volume of Trade between India and Pakistan through irregular channels like Dubai, Singapore and etc. ranges around over three billion dollars per annum. According to some estimates, the trade with India has the potential to be anywhere between 8 to 10 billion dollars. "If trade between Pakistan and India is liberalized the volume of exports of these commodities to India can take a quantum jump." Similarly, there is a great potential for export of fish, resins, animal & vegetable fats, beverages, spirits, vinegar, leather & leather goods, carpets, and tobacco.

Similarly, Pakistan can import cotton seed, meat, dairy products, vegetables, fruits, tea, tanning, dyeing extracts, chemical products, rubber and rubber products, raw materials and semi finished products etc. "We, the business community, are committed to have a serious, sustainable and constructive engagement with India and early and full normalization of relations on the basis of mutual non-interference, peaceful co-existence and respect for each other." Executive Committee members Sheikh Mohammad Ayub, Khamis Saeed Butt, Zeeshan Khalil, Nasir Saeed, Waqar Ahmad Mian, Chaudhry Wajid Ali, Mehmood Ghaznavi, Sheikh Mohammad Ashfaq, Rehman Aziz Chan, Shoaib Zahid Malik and Indian Commercial Attache Arvidh Saxsena also spoke on the occasion.

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