

LCCI urged the Government to expedite work on Iran

The Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry Wednesday urged the government to expedite work on Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline and complete it as early as possible. In a statement issued here, the LCCI President Irfan Qaiser Sheikh said that the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry had credible reports that the work on this multi-million dollar project is stalled for unknown reasons but was unable to understand the causes of the delay in this highly beneficial project of national importance when the gas pricing formula had already agreed in 2009 and Tehran and Islamabad had also inked the final agreement to launch the project by spring 2014. The LCCI President said that the Iranian government had already completed its part of the project and if Pakistani authorities show some interest, the pipeline would complete much earlier than the stipulated period which is actually need of the hour. Irfan Qaiser Sheikh said that the severest-ever shortage of gas in the country calls for extraordinary measures on war footing and the people sitting at the helm of affairs should gear up their efforts for the early completion of the project.

He said that the government should also take the business community in general and the Lahore Chamber of Commerce & Industry in particular on board on this project as the shortage in the province of Punjab severest while there is no shortage in the other provinces so that industrialists who are planning to shift their operations to other countries could be asked to shelve their plans.

The LCCI President said that there a huge number of industries where the gas is basic raw material and due to its acute shortage there would be no work in these units while the graph of unemployment would go up further. Irfan Qaiser Sheikh said that if the federal government takes the private sector on board on this mega project it would not be adding any cost to it but definitely ensure its early completion. He said that the reports about suspension of work on Pakistan-Iran gas pipeline had sent a very wrong signal to the private sector that needs to be corrected by restarting work on this project so that they could be able to do their businesses with peace of mind.

According to the project proposal, the pipeline will begin from Iran's Assalouyeh Energy Zone in the south and stretch over 1,100 km through Iran. In Pakistan, it will pass through Baluchistan and Sindh but officials now say the route may be changed if China agrees to the project. The gas will be supplied from the South Pars field. The initial capacity of the pipeline will be 22 billion cubic meters of natural gas per annum, which is expected to be later raised to 55 billion cubic meters. It is expected to cost \$7.4 billion.