

Lahore Chamber proposal to ease visa procedures

While agreeing with the LCCI proposal to ease visa procedures, the Indian Commercial attaché Arvind Saxena has assured that a businessmen-specific liberal and flexible visa regime would be in place very soon. He was talking to LCCI President Irfan Qaiser Sheikh, Vice President Saeeda Nazar here at the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry on Saturday. Vice President SAARC Chamber of Commerce Iftikhar Ali Malik and former LCCI President Sheikh Mohammad Asif and former Vice President Shafqat Saeed Piracha also spoke on the occasion. Arvind Saxena said that Pakistani businessmen are always facilitated whenever they intend to visit their counterparts in India. On the issue on Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs), the Indian diplomat made it clear that Pakistani businessmen should not be afraid of Indian Non-Tariff Barriers (NTBs) which are not at all Pakistan specific and are debateable.

Speaking on the occasion, the LCCI President Irfan Qaiser Sheikh said that the business community was happy with the Federal Cabinet decision to grant MFN status to India but it definitely want that all the genuine reservations of the various sectors must be removed through discussions. He said that frequent exchange of business delegations of the two countries, a flexible visa regime and one year multiple visas to businessmen would definitely bring prosperity to entire region. The LCCI President also stressed the need for early establishment of infrastructure at Wagah Border so that the businessmen of both the sides could be able to do business with ease. He informed the visiting diplomat that the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry is taking a big delegation to India in the month of December.

The LCCI President also appreciated the inclusion of 12 more items in the positive list. Irfan Qaiser Sheikh said that both the government of Pakistan and India should liaise closely with the private sector to stimulate the economic growth in the region. He said that the promotion of trade is the only way to minimise the political tension in the region. The two neighboring countries should not mix trade with politics and business community should be allowed to carry on trade without hurdles. He especially mentioned to the Indian envoy about the NTBs (non-tariff barriers) being imposed by the Indian government to block smooth flow of Pakistan's export into India. He demanded of the Indian government to lift all NTBs. "If we would have strong trade relations the political relations would get better automatically", he said. He stressed the need for promoting border trade particularly through land routes which is in favour of both the countries. He said that the potential gains from increased economic integration between India and Pakistan are large whereas mutual trade between the two countries is unnaturally small.

Further efforts to facilitate and increase trade can become an effective tool to progress and prosperity. Pakistan's major exports to India include vegetables, fruits & nuts, sugar confectionery, mineral fuels, salt etc., but these exports form a very insignificant proportion of India's imports of these commodities. A big chunk of these commodities is imported by India from countries other than Pakistan. If trade between Pakistan and India is liberalized the 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, pharmaceutical products, chemicals and tobacco. Similarly, Pakistan can import cotton seed, meat, dairy products, vegetables, fruits, tea, cereals, organic chemicals, pharmaceutical products, tanning, dyeing extracts, chemical products, plastics, rubber and rubber products, iron & steel, machinery, vehicles, raw materials and semi finished products etc.

The LCCI President said that India should allow the representatives of private sector of Pakistan to establish trade offices for various products in India. We believe that easing restrictions on visas, specifically allowing multiple entry visas for businessmen, eliminating the requirements to report arrival to the police at each place of stay, abolishing city-specific visas, and speeding up the approval processes can ensure facilitation to explore new avenues of trade promotion. The LCCI president said, "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. The following Executive Committee members also attended the meeting. Nasir Saeed, Waqar Ahmad Mian, Chaudhry Wajid Ali, Zeeshan Khalil, Rehman Aziz Chann, Ahmad Hasnain and Nabila Intisar.

INFORMATION DEPARTMENT