

India urged to improve trade facilities at border

The Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry has urged the Indian government to facilitate export of cement through land route because Pakistani exporters are facing multifarious problems due to limited railway interchanges and absence of parking facilities and modern security scanning equipment for consignments on the Indian side. The demand was raised by LCCI delegation in an exclusive meeting with Indian High Commissioner Sharat Sabharwal here in a local hotel on Wednesday. The delegation comprised LCCI President Zafar Iqbal Chaudhry, Vice President Faisal Iqbal Sheikh, Vice President SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry Iftikhar Ali Malik, former LCCI President Mian Shafqat Ali, former Senior Vice President Sohail Lashari, former Vice President Aftab Ahmad Vohra, Chairman PIAF Irfan Qaiser Sheikh and Convener LCCI Standing Committee on Diplomatic Missions Tariq Rehman. The LCCI delegation was of the view that the immediate barrier in the way of export was inadequate transportation facilities for the lucrative trade across the border despite the fact that both the sides realized the need for improving road transportation facilities for smooth flow of trade. "No cement consignments are moving through the road route due to infrastructure constraints like absence of parking facilities and modern security scanning equipment for consignments on the Indian side." The orders were pending due to limited railway interchanges at Attari and lack of parking facilities on the Indian side of the border for Pakistani trucks, they said. The delegation also stressed the need for issuance of multiple business visas for longer period as this would have a very positive impact on overall two-way trade between Pakistan and India. Man-to-man interaction is the most important factor when one talks of bilateral trade between the two countries and by issuing multiple visas to businessmen, the embassies on both the side would be doing a great service to the respective economies of Pakistan and India, said LCCI President Zafar Iqbal Chaudhry. Zafar Iqbal Chaudhry informed the Indian High Commissioner that India is the largest trading partner of Pakistan in SAARC region. The trade between two countries was estimated to the tune of \$ 2.3 billion through official channels and similar amount of trade is done through third country. The LCCI President said that both the sides can save foreign exchange of billions of dollars per annum, if imports from third country which are not locally manufactured and are being imported from far-flung places Brazil, Mexico, Australia and Germany are channelised. The Vice President SAARC Chamber of Commerce and Industry Iftikhar Ali Malik said that Pakistan has undertaken liberal policy towards South Asia and particularly towards India, which is visible through the persistent improvement in bilateral trade. Increase in importable list of items from India from over 400 to more than 1900 items at 6-digit H.S. Code level within four years, which is now about 30% of the total importable items in Pakistan from the world. Encouraging trade through Wagha Border and Conversion of Line of Control into Line of Trade besides allowing investment from India on case to case basis are some of the policy measures introduced by Pakistan during four to five years, he added. The promotion of bilateral investment will not only create more business opportunities for the

businessmen but would also increase stake of India and Pakistan in each other's country. However, for harnessing business opportunities between two countries, both the sides would have to ensure a flexible visa regime by exempting police reporting and restriction of cities on businessmen. Removal of Non-Tariff Barriers would go a long way in bringing both the sides closer in economic terms. The Indian High Commissioner Sharat Sabharwal thanked the each member of the delegation for feedback on economic issues and promised to take up them with concerned government departments in India. First Secretary at Indian High Commission in Islamabad Mr Binaya Srikanta Pradhan was also present in the meeting.

Shahid Khalil
(INFORMATION DEPARTMENT)