

LAHORE: Pakistan has been trapped by the international force to facilitate India for market access to Afghanistan and Central Asian States and get the Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status from Pakistan while multiple non-tariff barriers (NTBs) for import of Pakistani products to India are still imposed. Pakistan has taken a decision to grant the MFN status to India in haste while putting the Kashmir and other issues on the backburner as without resolve the longstanding issues, bilateral trade could not be long-lasting. These views were expressed by the participants in Jang Economic Session on ♦Trade with India: will exports increase♦ held here in the provincial metropolis. The participants were economist Dr Nadia Saleem, Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) Vice President Mian Abuzar Shad, industrialists Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh, Mian Anjum Nisar, Shahid Sheikh and Saadat Ijaz. The event was hosted by Sikindar Hameed Lodhi and Intikhab Tariq. Dr Nadia Saleem said the Pakistani imports from India in 1947 were 50 percent and exports were 23 percent which had now reduced to only four per cent. She said informal bilateral trade volume stood at \$3 billion while the Pakistani currency was deprecating and Indian appreciating. She said India had granted the MFN status to Pakistan but never removed the NTBs, which hindered the Pakistani exports to India. She said India put 64 percent textile and agriculture products in negative list for trade with Pakistan. She said Pakistan had lost the time to trade with India on its own terms and now it had to compete with India by lowering its cost of production. Mian Abuzar Shad said India had gotten free market of Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asian States of more than 600 million people after getting the MFN status from Pakistan while problems for Pakistan would increase. He said the Pakistani products had huge potential in India but due to piracy, it lost market within a year. He believed that industrial revolution was crucial before granting the MFN status to India. He called for one-day working visa for both sides♦ business community at borders. Qaiser Ahmed Sheikh said India had investment attraction in Pakistan and could establish its industrial base in Pakistan to export products back to India. He called for value addition of products to increase the exports. Mian Anjum Nisar said the US, Canada and ASEAN countries benefited from regional trade but Pakistan had given the MFN status to India in haste without consulting the stakeholders. He said in 2004, under the SAFTA agreement, it was decided to bring down the tariff rate at five percent by 2013 but it was still at 25 percent while India had reduced it to 10 percent. He said Pakistani commerce and trade and industry ministries were unaware about the country♦s situation while the National Tariff Commission had also become toothless. He said the Pakistani government did not conduct any study for opening of trade with India. He said the Indian agriculture sector was heavily subsidised and diesel was also cheaper there while in Pakistan everything was costlier. In such a scenario, the Pakistani exports will never increase, he opined. Shahid Sheikh said the Kashmir issue had been put on the backburner while only bilateral trade was being discussed. He said both the countries would get growth opportunities with bilateral trade but Pakistani government should also perform its duties responsibly to get advantage from this potential. He said Pakistan had made free trade agreement with Sri Lanka but was unable to tap the potential as Pakistani exports increased by only three percent after it while imports from Sri Lanka had increased by 70 percent. Saadat Ijaz said India had imposed NTBs on Pakistani products while daily a huge quantity of fruit and vegetables reached Pakistan from India via sea and land routes but it refused Pakistani citrus penetration in the Indian markets. He said Pakistan had given corridor facility to Nato containers to Afghanistan and never charged properly but now it should charge actual charges for it. He said the Indian trade with

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Written by Shumaila Ahmed

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Afghanistan would be through land route due to the MFN status to India.</p> <p>❖</p>
<p>Courtesy: The News</p>