

3-day cross-LoC meet on trade begins

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A 3-day cross-LoC conference began here on Tuesday to deliberate on the issues confronting the stakeholders and is also likely to come up with suggestions towards enhancing the economic interactions through the trade between the two parts of Jammu and Kashmir. “We’ll not miss the opportunity to identify the shortcomings of the trade being projected as the most significant confidence building measure in Kashmir by both India and Pakistan faces,” said a participant on Tuesday.

The stakeholders, the organisers said, will assess the socio-economic impact of the cross-LoC trade over the past four years and bring about greater synergy between the traders and the concerned government departments for the smooth conduct of the trade.

At the inaugural function, speakers called for declaring Jammu and Kashmir as it existed prior to the first Kashmir war of 1947-48, a Free-Trade Zone, towards making up missed opportunities of developing the Himalayan region due to decades of hostility between India and Pakistan.

(Paradoxically, an official handout issued here on the event refers to Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir as AJK, or Azad Jammu and Kashmir, as the official name of the territory goes.)

The conference titled “Cross LoC Trade, Regional Development: Opportunities and Challenges”, is the first-ever such event and is being organised by the Centre for Dialogue and Reconciliation, New Delhi (CDR) with an objective to explore the future possibilities, opportunities and challenges of the cross-LoC trade by bringing together the stakeholders from both sides of the de facto border.

The key faces supportive of the idea of enhancing the cross-LoC trade and who spoke on the occasion include former Union foreign secretary Salman Haider, presidents of Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industries PoK and J&K, Zulifkar Abbasi and Dr Mubeen Shah, Amit Chadha of CDR and Sushabha Barve.

Reiterating that the initiation of trade and travel between the divided parts of the state is one of the most significant confidence building measure taken by the governments of India and Pakistan, Jammu and Kashmir’s minister for industries and commerce Surjeet Singh Salathia while inaugurating the conference said that cross-LoC trade is the “most promising development in recent years to normalise the relations between the two neighbouring countries through enhanced economic and human interactions.”