

[Banking system to replace barter trade: Govt](#)

Across LoC, plea to declare J&K free trade zone

KT NEWS SERVICE

SRINAGAR, July 10 : The participants in the first ever trans Line of Control traders' conference today called for declaring pre-partition Jammu and Kashmir a Free Trade Zone for to develop the region which has suffered due to India-Pakistan hostility.

"We have recommended to both India and Pakistan that final vision of cross LoC trade is that whole Jammu and Kashmir should be declared as a Free Trade Zone," Mubeen Shah, the president of Joint Chamber of Commerce and Industries said.

The JKJCCI was formed in November 2011 in Istanbul Turkey by four major Chambers and Federations of Industries from both sides of the divide. The body is first ever non-governmental cooperation between different organisations from both sides of the LoC.

Joining Shah, former president JKJCCI, Zulfikhar Abbasi insisted that ownership of the trade should lie with the State of Jammu and Kashmir. He insisted that the decisions of on the Cross LoC trade should not lie with those sitting in Islamabad and in New Delhi. Instead, he said, the stakeholders should be allowed to take the decision while as higher authorities in New Delhi and Islamabad should implement them. "The stakeholders are the traders."

"The list of the items has decreased from 21 to 15. There is no banking facility. There is confusion and chaos as the traders are losing money and they feel being trapped," he said.

Traders from both the parts of Jammu and Kashmir today said the LoC trade would give real dividends to the State if the traders are allowed to meet each other and they be given all facilities including banking.

"The traders from this part of Jammu and Kashmir are not being allowed to visit Pakistan Administered Kashmir. There has to be actual trade and it would happen when the traders of both the parts of the State are allowed to interact and meet each other," Mubeen Shah said

On in its part J&K government suggested inclusion of 27 new items to the trans-LoC trade.

"We will do whatever is possible to ensure the initiative sustains. We have already conveyed to the central government about the additional items that we want to trade through the two routes," industries minister Surjit Singh Slathia.

"Initiation of trade and travel between the divided parts of the state is one of the most significant Confidence Building Measures (CBM) taken by the governments of India and Pakistan. The Cross LoC trade is the most promising development in recent years to normalize the relations between the two neighbouring countries through enhanced economic and human interactions," the minister said.

"The enhanced economic interactions through cross-loc trade would also act as a catalyst for ameliorating the conflicts and resolution of the disputes between the two neighbouring countries," he said.

About sixty participants representing various trade and business organizations of J&K and PAK are participating in the conference.

The Minister the initiation of cross-LoC trade in October, 2005 indicated beginning of a new era in the sub-continent. "There is an urgent need to push forward it on sustainable basis," he added.

Quoting prime minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh that "we cannot change borders, we can make them irrelevant, Slathia said trade and commerce will provide the tools that would make way for an alternate to the direct solution of the problems between both nations.

"Both the countries have established Trade Facilitation Centers (TFCS) near the entry points on both routes. Efforts are underway to replace present 'barter' system of trade by providing banking transaction facility to the traders," he said.

Barter trade was permitted by the two governments in October 2008 from Uri and Poonch without any formal system for communication, banking, interaction or dispute resolution. By now the cumulative turnover of the

eight-days-a-month trade is nearing Rs 1600 crore.

Sounding optimistic, the former foreign secretary Salman Haider said few years ago it was decided that effort should be made that there should be trade between the two parts of Jammu and Kashmir and “now we have trade today.” He said the conference would allow participants to come out with a strategy to move forward. In her address CDR president Sushoba Barve subtly talked about difficulties faced by the traders. “I wanted the traders from PaK to come in the cross LoC bus but it didn’t materialise. It took me five months to organize this conference,” she said.

“I can write a book on how many difficulties I faced in organizing this conference,” she said. However, Barve said the conference will discuss the way forward and submit the recommendations to New Delhi and Islamabad.