

Convention on cross-LoC trade begins today

Traders from both sides of the LoC to participate in three-day-long meet

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For the first-time ever, traders from both sides of the Line of Control (LoC) would meet here tomorrow at a convention that has been organised with an aim to boost the cross-LoC trade and identify the hurdles therein. The three-day-long conference titled "Cross-LoC Trade, Regional Development: Opportunities and Challenges" is being organised by the Centre for Dialogue and Reconciliation (CDR), New Delhi, and would be attended by 60 participants, representing various trade and business organisations across the LoC. "Since the opening of the LoC trade, this is the first time that traders from both sides of the LoC would be meeting in Jammu and Kashmir. The conference will look at general as well as specific issues related to the cross-LoC trade and will come up with recommendations that will be submitted to the governments of both the countries. It will explore the future possibilities, opportunities and challenges of the trade by bringing together stakeholders from both sides of the LoC," a CDR spokesman said.

President of Kashmir Chamber of Commerce and Industry (KCCI) Abdul Hamid Punjabi, whose group would be attending the convention, said it would provide an opportunity for the traders from across the LoC to sit at one place, which would augur well for the development of the trade. "There are many bottlenecks that have to be removed. Our agenda would be to raise issues like banking and proper communication facilities for traders and find a solution," Punjabi told The Tribune. The cross-LoC trade was started with much fanfare in October 2008 around three years after the start of the LoC bus service from here to Muzaffarabad in the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir in April 2005. The trade and bus service were started as part of confidence-building measures between India and Pakistan. However, main demands of the traders, who are still doing business through the age-old barter system, are yet to be fulfilled. The traders have been demanding the setting up of proper banking and communication facilities, besides exemption from the purview of value-added tax (VAT) and expansion of list of items that can be traded.

Besides Salamabad, which is located at Uri in Baramulla district, the LoC trade is also done through Chakan-da-Bagh in Poonch district of the Jammu region. The cross-LoC convention would be attended by representatives of the Jammu & Kashmir Joint Chambers of Commerce and Industry (JKJCCI), Kashmir and Jammu Chambers of Commerce and Industries, Federation of Industries of Kashmir and Jammu, Cross-LoC Traders Associations from Salamabad and Poonch. The delegation from PoK include representatives of the JKJCCI, Chambers of Commerce of Muzaffarabad, Mirpur, Bhimber, Kotli and LoC Traders Associations of Rawalakot, Hajira and Muzaffarabad.