

**Speech by High Commissioner at Islamabad  
to members of the Peshawar Chamber of Commerce and Industry  
[Islamabad; 20 February 2017]**

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Peshawar Chamber of Commerce and Industry,

Although I have not yet had the opportunity to visit Peshawar, I am delighted to meet so many of you in Islamabad today. I extend a warm welcome to this commercial interaction with me and some of my key officers at the Indian High Commission.

2. Over the past one year that I have been in Pakistan I have repeatedly stated my belief that the road to the normalization of India-Pakistan relations lies through greater business ties, enhanced trade links and increased economic interactions. All of you have a very important role to play in this process. As many of you know direct trade between India and Pakistan amounts to roughly USD 2.5 billion annually. Indirect trade, through third countries amounts to USD 5 billion thereby giving a total amount of India-Pakistan trade of USD 7.5 billion. This is far below the potential that exists between our two countries.

3. Therefore, I would request each and every one of you to give some thought and attention to how we can expand and enhance our trade and economic links. A study recently done by an Indian economic think tank has come to the conclusion that the cheapest way for India and Pakistan to trade will be across the border at Wagah. It is cheaper to trade through Wagah than

by the sea route to Karachi. I agree that our two Governments need to make the Wagah border an easier transit point for people, goods and services.

4. A lot of spade work has been undertaken by the two Governments in the period 2012 and 2013 and some excellent ideas for the expansion of trade are on the drawing board. We need to implement these suggestions so as to achieve our objective of greater economic interaction between our countries.

5. I am aware that many of you would think how can we increase trade when even travelling to the other country is difficult. We accept that the visa process is lengthy and cumbersome but let me add that for genuine businessman like many of you, India provides a long-term, multiple entry business visa. We accept that it is incumbent on the two Governments to work out a much easier visa regime.

6. I also want to share with all of you that our High Commission at Islamabad has been issuing the same number of visas as in the past and that despite heightened concerns large numbers of Pakistani visitors have been travelling to India.

7. I thank you for being with us today and look forward to hearing your own suggestions for expanding trade and commerce between India and Pakistan.

Thank you

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