

## **Pandemic has increased importance of e-commerce, says FPCCI VP**

KARACHI: The Covid-19 pandemic has increased the requirement of e-commerce and digital Pakistan.

Vice President of the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) Sheikh Sultan Rehman stated this in a webinar on "E-commerce and Digital Pakistan: Prospects & Challenges" held via zoom link.

He emphasized on the implementation of e-Commerce and Digital Pakistan Policy for the promotion of e-business in Pakistan.

He said Covid-19 had increased online business wherein social marketing also played a crucial role, adding the promotion of e-commerce didn't need large investment for the promotion of brand and marketing of new products.

He also stressed on creating awareness to small businesses for utilisation of technology as 64 percent of Pakistan's population was youth which could quickly adopt technology and subsequently promote IT-related business.

In her remarks, Aisha Moriani, Joint Secretary for Ministry of Commerce updated the participants about important aspects of e-commerce policy like regulation and facilitation, financial inclusion and digitisation through payment infrastructure, empowering youth and SMEs through business support programmes and trade development, customer protection, taxation structure, ICT infrastructure and telecom services in Pakistan, logistics, data protection and investment and global connectivity etc.

She also informed about the development of cross border e-commerce system for promotion of trade and establishment of national e-commerce councils for promoting startups, simplifying payment options, reducing disputes and protection of consumer rights.

Raza Ahmed Sukhera, Project Manager, Ministry of Information Technology also enlightened the participants about development of new softwares, availability of internet access, business facilitation measures, establishment of IT valley, strengthening of R&D in ICT sector, facilitation of SMEs, and startups etc. He added that there was huge potential in e-commerce industry as the global e-commerce sales had reached \$3.4 trillion while Pakistan e-commerce sales stood at \$2 billion.

Pakistan Software Houses Association (PASHA) Chairman Shehzad Shahid indicated that the IT related exports of Pakistan were increased by 23 percent last year which reflected the potential of that sector.

He said the government had set target for next three years upto \$5 billion for e-commerce sales, adding most of the companies working in IT sector were at small scale and “we have to increase investment in IT sector. Technology has improved the business environment and we have to improve connectivity and quality of internet service in order to compete globally. Pakistan is currently using cash on delivery system which has to be digital and in this context, banks should come forward with better incentives in order to facilitate digital payments,” he added.

He informed that Punjab government had reduced GST to five percent on e-payments and other provinces should also adopt similar policy. “Moreover, we have to give incentives on buying of Pakistani products which will improve our innovation and ultimately benefit the domestic industry. Pakistan Post is the only company in Pakistan which has largest logistics network which also need facilitation for improving their services and reduction of cost.”

Talha Nadeem, Senior Analyst SBP also suggested enhancement of role of Pakistan Post in financial inclusion and urged for enhancement of its penetration for SMEs, freelance and microfirms.

Shamim Rajani COO Genetech Solutions also requested for holding of training sessions on digital marketing particularly for handicrafts and other products of women entrepreneurs.

Altaf Hashwani Sana Safinaz also updated the houses about growth in their business with e-commerce domestically to 70 percent.

Mehreen Illahi stated about the involvement of e-business in fashion and handicraft industry.