

### **Trade and business activities badly affected in Punjab**

LAHORE: While the number of coronavirus cases is increasing with every passing day, trade and business activities across the province have badly hampered and the daily wage earners are worst effectees.

Not only routine business activities have effected but the flow of trade has declined putting threat to earnings of the people having dependency on daily business activities. Major markets and bazaars in Lahore, including Anarkali, Icchra, Gulberg and Township, are wearing deserted look.

“The month of March is considered peak season due to wedding activities but the coronavirus threat has dwindle the business activities,” Shahzad Butt, a trader of Anarkali Bazaar said while talking to Business Recorder on Friday.

He said that traders of Anarkali are deeply concerned over this deadly virus and praying for overcoming this challenge. He added that they invested heavily due to expected peak business this month.

Fruit and vegetables vendors, seen on the road sides, were also complaining about low turnout of buyers. It is generally observed that in the evening, the people are seen buying fruits from street vendors on their way home. However, for the past few days no rush is seen on these carts. Due to panicky situation created by coronavirus people are remaining indoors.

A vegetable seller, Arsalan has seen a sharp decline in his sales. He said that the prices are the same, but he sold more fruit last week then this week. “For the past few days, there is no rush on the roads; hence; walk-in customers have drastically declined. They probably go for Sunday bazaars to limit their outdoor exposure,” he added

A fruit vendor Bahadar Khan started weeping when this scribe asked him about daily sale. He said there is no buyer and he is suffering losses. “I am more worried about feeding my family then about the virus,” he said, adding: “my wife is facing serious health issue and I am unable to make my both ends meet.”

A meat seller Zafar Ahmed said his sale has considerably declined due to coronavirus spread. He said he used to sell huge quantity of meat to different restaurants but they have reduced their orders about 70 percent.

An owner of a restaurant who is involved in BBQ business said that his business has reduced significantly due to this virus. He said that they are not even able to clear salaries of his staff members what to say about sale volume. “The people are not coming out of their residences, which has reduced their sales,” he said.

Construction labourers working on daily-wage are also hit by the current situation, they are finding it hard to find a job. “It is consecutive a third day that I am going home empty handed. We wait all day for someone to hire us, but no one comes. People have temporally halted their construction work due to fear of the virus,” said Adnan, a labourer.

Meanwhile, the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) said that supply chain of the edibles and essentials is well maintained by the traders therefore masses should do their purchases as usual.

LCCI President Irfan Iqbal Sheikh said due to outstanding role of the trading community, there is no dearth of edibles and other essentials. He hoped that traders would continue to play their outstanding role at this testing time and supplement the government efforts to control the coronavirus.

He said that government is already doing well; “epidemic of coronavirus is well in control because of appreciable and strict measures of the government but still a lot of work has to be done to avert its spread”.

Sheikh suggested that awareness campaign should be more effective and all segments of society should adopt all safety measures.

He said that the Lahore Chamber is playing its role and has already established a fund with seed money of Rs10 million. He appealed to the members of the Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry to show generosity as country cannot afford to be severe victim of coronavirus.

LCCI Senior Vice President Ali Hussam Asghar and Vice President Mian Zahid Jawaaid Ahmad said that matchless cooperation of the LCCI members has always given a new strength and encouragement to the Chamber. They said that the LCCI has also taken various safety measures at its premises.