

Envoys urged to make efforts towards enhancing exports

Prime Minister Imran Khan on Friday directed the country's embassies and missions abroad to make all-out efforts to enhance the country's exports, attract foreign investment and help check the menace of money laundering. Addressing the concluding session of a two-day envoys conference on "Economic Diplomacy: Partnership and Synergy", organised by Foreign Office in collaboration with Ministry of Commerce and Board of Investment (BOI), the Prime Minister issued special directives to Ministry of Foreign Affairs and envoys posted abroad to rise to the occasion and promote soft image of Pakistan abroad through proactive economic diplomacy.

He said Pakistan is a fertile territory for investment making it the most attractive destination for business and opportunities, adding that his government believes in providing cordial atmosphere for ease of doing business. He said the nation needs to change its mindset of depending on others and make coordinated national efforts to convert the current challenges at different fronts into opportunities.

"The current crisis of balance of payment and the place where Pakistan stands today also provide opportunities, as we have to change our mindset and come out of the dependency syndrome," the Prime Minister said, adding that the flawed mindset of the past has caused great damage to the country's reputation, "as we had to put our foreign policy in line with the wishes of foreign powers and international financial institutions such as IMF."

"As we know, there is no such thing as a free lunch...everything has strings attached," he said, adding that the policy of reliance on others has lost Pakistanis' self-respect and independence.

The Prime Minister pointed out that there are new avenues for enhancing exports especially Africa and Latin America, adding that there is a need for vigorous efforts to explore new markets for Pakistani products in Africa and Latin America.

He also asked Foreign Secretary Tehmina Janjua to seek regular reports from the ambassadors abroad regarding their performance. "What are they [ambassadors] doing? Tehmina! You need to seek regular reports from the envoys, as there are great opportunities in Africa," he further instructed the foreign secretary.

The Prime Minister asked the envoys to keep in touch with the BOI to open new avenues for exports and attracting the foreign investment. Rejecting the timeframe until the February-end of the coming year sought by BOI Chairman Haroon Ashraf, he directed the BOI chairman to expedite efforts on the work plan, adding: "We don't have time until February."

He said that overseas Pakistanis are the great asset of the country and directed the ambassadors posted abroad and the country's foreign missions to extend every possible assistance and cooperation to Pakistani workers and Diaspora, convincing them to invest in their home country.

He further instructed the envoys to prepare lists of the potential overseas Pakistani businessmen, investors and keep in regular contact with them to attract them investing in the country. "We have to provide every possible assistance to them and address their concerns as well as removing constraints in investing back at home," he said.

The Prime Minister also directed Pakistan's embassies abroad to give special attention to the working class who are the real asset of the country by contributing in the economy through sending remittances. "We have to create compassion for the working class...there should be special empathy for them and they should be provided assistance through establishing community services," he said.

He regretted that Pakistan's elite has ditched the country at international level for their own vested interest, adding that the past rulers projected themselves as liberals and progressive and painted rest of the nation as fundamentalists and extremists, which has caused an enormous damage to the national image.

He said wealth creation is necessary for job opportunities and prosperity and the government will stand by the business people to enhance their profitability.

The Prime Minister also urged the envoys to play their due role in checking money laundering as the government is committed to eliminating this menace. He said that huge amount of money is being laundered abroad through fake bank accounts, which is also one of the reasons behind the pressure on the rupee. He added, "Team work among Foreign Office, Ministry of Commerce and BOI is a key to our success in the economic diplomacy." Addressing the conference, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said that it has been decided that all the ministries concerned including Foreign Affairs, Commerce, Finance and Board of Investment (BOI) will launch a coordinated approach to work jointly to identify new avenues, attract foreign direct investment and promote exports.

For doing this, he said that there was need to change the mindset, restore the confidence of the foreign investors and Pakistani Diaspora who are almost 9 million in number. "We made consultations in the two-day conference how to come out of the economic quagmire, break the chains of slavery of the international monetary institutions such as IMF [International Monetary Fund] and big powers," he said, adding that Pakistan has availed the IMF packages for 16 times and it is going to knock its door once again.

He also referred to the lack of capacity of the institutions, saying the government had agreed with the Chinese government to establish nine special economic zones (SEZs) but the situation on ground is that three of the country's provinces lack the capacity to run the SEZs.

Qureshi maintained that due to the flawed economic policies and priorities of the past governments, Pakistan's share in the global trade is only 0.12 percent. "We have to keep these challenges and problems in view while progressing on our new economic policy," he said, adding that cooperation of the private sector is very important in this regard.

The foreign minister said that the conference has compiled recommendations which will be presented to the Prime Minister, adding that Foreign Office is ready to deliver on its role as facilitator on the targets.

He pointed out that the worst internal situation caused negative image of the country at international level, adding that an effective foreign policy is not possible without keeping in view the internal situation.

Qureshi said that Pakistan's ambassadors to Japan, Republic of Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, UAE, Turkey, UK, Spain, Italy and Germany made presentations in the conference.

He stressed that economic diplomacy should constitute the core of Pakistan's foreign policy in a changing global environment. He said that Ministry of Foreign Affairs in collaboration with other stakeholders should devise a strategy to promote trade, attract investment, and seek new markets for Pakistani exports.

The two-day conference focused on how to scale up trade and investment - critical to Pakistan's economic revival. At the conclusion of the conference, the recommendations based on inputs of the participants were presented to the Prime Minister.

In addition, representatives of public and private sectors as well as government institutions attended the conference. Participants, inter alia, included representatives from Pakistan Business Council, FPCCI, Farmers Associations of Pakistan, Alitheia Capital, JW-SEZ Group, Gul Ahmed Textile, OICCI, Gree and NRSP.