

Exclusive interview with Punjab Governor Ch Muhammad Sarwar

Punjab Governor stresses need for bridging import, export gap for sustainable economic growth, uplift

Pakistan is a peaceful country and all conspiracies of enemy will be foiled: Sarwar



Punjab Governor Ch Muhammad Sarwar giving exclusive interview to *Daily The Business*

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Pakistan was granted GSP Plus in 2014, since then the country's exports to the European Union (EU) have depicted a quantum increase from 4.54 billion euros in 2013 to 7.50 billion euros in 2020, registering an increase of 65 percent. As many as 1,500 projects of water filtration plants under the Punjab Aab-e-Pak Authority have been completed and the filtration plants are being inaugurated in various localities of Lahore. The government has been working hard to control the inflation and poverty through different initiatives including health and Insaf Card, Ehsas Programme and the Kisaan Card. Trade deficit is one big bottleneck in the way of our economic prosperity. There is a fire need to strike balance between import and exports to ensure sustainable economic growth and development. Governor Punjab Chaudhry Muhammad Sarwar shared these views with Daily The Business in an exclusive interview the other day.

Following are some of the excerpts from the interview:

Daily The Business: You have been very instrumental in obtaining the Generalised Scheme of Preference-Plus (GSP+) status for Pakistan. To what extent Pakistan actually have has been able to utilise the status?

Governor Punjab: The facility had proved beneficial for Pakistan as it has played an important role in the growth of trade between the two sides. Pakistan was granted GSP Plus in 2014, since then our exports to the European Union have depicted a quantum increase from 4.54 billion euros in 2013 to 7.50 billion euros in 2020, registering an increase of 65 percent.

Textile and garments have been the main sectors that benefited from the status most, earning huge foreign exchange and generating employment opportunities in the country. During my recent visit to Europe, I have met more than 120 Members of Parliament (MPs) to get the extension in GSP Plus status for Pakistan. I hope Pakistan will receive an extension in the GSP Plus status from the European Union for another 10 years.

You floated the idea of Punjab Aab-e-Pak Authority. What is the basic reason behind that?

As many as 1500 projects of water filtration plants under the Punjab Aab-e-Pak Authority have been completed and filtration plants are being inaugurated in Lahore. The basic reason behind this is to protect people from unsafe water across the province. Over 80 percent of people in the province are consuming unsafe drinking water and around 1.1 million people die annually due to waterborne diseases. The Authority will provide clean drinking water to over 110 million people by installing water filtration plants. The water filtration plants will also be installed in jails, hospitals and universities and the authority will provide clean drinking water to people of Punjab within the lifetime of this parliament. Over 80 percent of people in the province are consuming unsafe drinking water and around 1.1 million people die annually due to waterborne diseases. The Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf's government in Punjab will relieve people of the problem of contaminated drinking

water. In Lahore alone, around 200,000 children are being reported to be taken to the Children's Hospital due to waterborne diseases. In hospitals, 50 percent of people were being admitted due to waterborne diseases.

The Sarwar Foundation has been setting up filtration plants in jails and committed to making the facility available in all prisons across the province. I am not alone in this endeavour a number of philanthropists and businessmen from home and abroad to are also with me.

We have ensured complete transparency in these projects and therefore the international organisations including the UNICEF is also collaborating with us in our mission to provide clean drinking water to the people of Punjab. I assure you that more than seven million people of Punjab will get clean drinking water soon.

Before coming to the power, the PTI government pledged to the people of Pakistan providing them with as much relief as it could. But after the PTI's three years in power, things have turned the other way around. The worst ever inflation has made life miserable for the people of all segments. How would you be able to move into the people to contest the next election and succeed?

We are doing our best to provide relief to the people and it is reality that we should work more in this regard. We have been working hard to control the present inflation and poverty through different initiatives including health and Insaf Card, Ehsas Programme and the Kisaan Card and I hope we will be able to face the people if we are able to bring reforms in institutions like police and judiciary and our government is working effectively on it.

As far as inflation is concerned, the government has provided a relief package of Rs 120 billion under the leadership of Prime Minister Imran Khan. In the coming days, the government will take further steps to control inflation and provide maximum relief to the people. The PTI can easily win next elections if good governance is ensured in the country.

Since the PTI government took over dollar appreciation and rupee depreciation are skyrocketing. Trade and industry is passing through hard time. How can we tackle these challenges by strengthening the economy?

Actually, trade deficit is one big bottleneck in the way

of our economic prosperity. Every year and every month, we have been witnessing widening trade deficit. We need to strike a balance between import and export to attain a sustainable economic growth. We have been working on it since we took over the rein. We were successful in bringing the trade deficit down to \$ 3 billion from \$20 billion. Since the Covid-19 has proved a hard blow for all the economies of the world, Pakistan was not an exception. This very pandemic had played havoc with everything as economies were the special victims of Covid-19.

The PTI government has been praised home and abroad in effectively talking the crisis and managing the economic affairs.

We have again had to start from the square one. Hopefully, things will be back on track soon.

There is a news circulating about Presidential System of governance in Pakistan is in the offing. Is it true?

Well, there is no room for presidential system in the country as the democratic system is strong enough in Pakistan. However, this is up to the democratic forces that have the mandate to develop consensus for the new system. If the stakeholders agree to bring about the change they can do.

Being the Chancellor of all public sector universities in the province, what major initiative have you taken for improvement?

This is for the first time that universities vice chancellors are being appointed on merit basis instead of recommendation.

During my tenure of over 20 Vice-Chancellors in different universities of Punjab have been appointed purely on merit as my mission is to ensure transparency and merit at all levels in universities and very act has improved education quality in our universities. Universities of Punjab are now among top 500 universities in the world.

How do you see a peaceful Afghanistan in the neighbourhood?

I have discussed the Afghanistan and Kashmir issues during my visit to Europe and UK and also highlighted the peace efforts of Pakistan. The whole world is now appreciating the role of Pakistan in the Afghan peace process. It is the reality that peace in the whole world

isn't possible without achieving peace in Afghanistan and, therefore, the whole world should play its role in it.

The Kashmiris have continuously been victimised by the fascist Indian Modi Sarkar. You have been known as the fast and close friend of the Britons and have deep hand in their politics. To what extent have you been able to convince them that the Kashmiris should be set free from the evil clutches of Indian occupation?

I have been vehemently advocating the Kashmir cause. A few weeks back I have impressed upon the need of resolution of the Kashmir issue for a durable peace in the region. During a recent meeting with the European Parliament Vice President, Hiedi Hautala and other members of European Parliament, I discussed in details the current situation in the region, Kashmir issue, peace in Afghanistan came under discussion.

I apprised the delegation of the gross violations of human rights in the Indian Illegally Occupied Held Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) and atrocities being committed against the Muslims and other minorities living in India and urged the European Union to play its role in peace in Afghanistan, resolution of Kashmir Issue and durable peace in the region. Pakistan has always played a positive role for establishing peace not only in the region, but the whole world.

The sacrifices rendered by the Pakistani nation against terrorism are unprecedented, therefore, settlement of the Kashmir issue in accordance with the resolutions of United Nations and dissuading India from war-mongering has become imperative for peace in the region. I strongly condemned the increase in the number of Indian police force in the Occupied Kashmir and the incidents of targeting Kashmiris. The Indian security forces cannot suppress the voice of Kashmiris with guns and bullets. The Kashmiris are now in high spirits. They will continue their struggle against terrorist India. Kashmir will be free one day and Pakistani nation also stand united with their Kashmiri brothers and sisters.

After Covid-19, Omicron variant is becoming lethal. To what extent the government is prepared to face the challenge?

Everyone should adopt precautionary measures to avoid the Omicron variant. It is our national responsibility to wear the face mask to get ourselves safe from the deadly virus. Our team is ready once again in providing the services in the COVID-19 as we had been doing earlier through telemedicine under the banner of Punjab Development Network.

The Anarkali blast has jolted Lahore once again after a long time. How do you see this cowardly attack by the miscreants?

I strongly condemned the incident of terrorism in Lahore. Pakistan will definitely defeat the terrorists. There are many foreign forces who are trying to destabilise Pakistan through such cowardly acts but one thing is clear that the people of Pakistan and the Pakistan Army is committed to foil the nefarious designs of the enemy. Pakistan is a peaceful country and all