

## An Exclusive Interview with

# Dr. Sarfraz Bashir

## President The Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry

**At the outset, would you like to share with us brief details about your education, early life, business ventures and past and current positions held by you?**

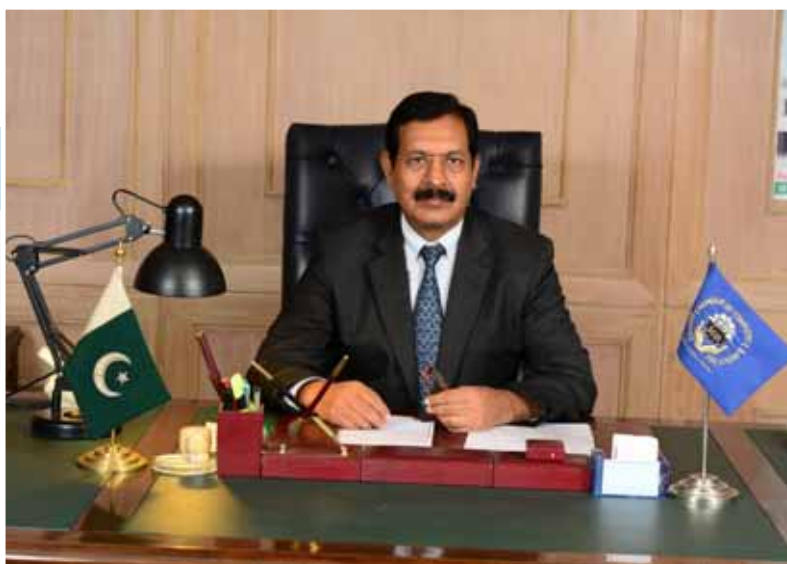
I had the opportunity to pursue higher education in Medicine and qualified MBBS, MCPS and FCPS examinations all in the first attempt. I got distinction in matriculation by securing 9th position in Lahore Board and was awarded National Talent Scholarship. I was serving as a Surgeon at Services Hospital Lahore when there was sad demise of my father in Dec. 1999. He was a prominent businessman of Sialkot by dint of sheer hard work in Surgical Instruments industry. After demise of father, I joined my family business and I have been working for the betterment of the commerce and industry since then. I have the honour and opportunity to serve twice as Senior Vice President earlier and now serving as President of this Chamber.

**Sialkot is one of the biggest industrial cities of Pakistan and world famous for its surgical instruments and sports goods. Can you provide a brief sketch of the other products manufactured and exported from Sialkot to the world and how much foreign exchange this city earns for the country?**

Sialkot is an important economic centre and the only export-oriented city in Pakistan. Development of local cottage industries in Sialkot has assumed a model status for the developing world. Thousands of small and medium enterprises, situated in and around the city, are engaged in honouring their global commitments for export of value-added goods. Through export of these items, the city is earning over US Dollars 1.6 Billion annually.

Sialkot made footballs, field hockey sticks, cricket gear, and boxing gloves are used in international games including the Olympics and World Cup. International Sports Goods brands like Adidas, Grays, Nike, Mikasa, Puma, etc. are working with different firms in Sialkot. The best cricket and hockey players of the world prefer to use "Made in Sialkot" cricket bats and hockey sticks.

Sportswear industry, owing to a skilled workforce, and entrepreneurial skills of businessmen is also well



established in the international market. Articles of sportswear include track suits, football, boxing, cycling, motto sports uniforms, shorts, T-shirts, wind breakers, judo karate kits, casual wear, stockings.

The Surgical Instruments, Beauty Items, Eye Instruments, and other Medical Instruments are supplied to practically all parts of the world. Top hospitals in USA, Canada and Europe use Sialkot made Instruments in Surgery and other procedures. Top quality leather goods are also exported from Sialkot to the international market. Similarly, other items including Military and Uniform Badges, Cutlery and Utensils produced in Sialkot are exported worldwide.

**It is a great pride and honour for our country that in the recent FIFA World Cup 2014, the footballs were imported from M/s. Forward Sports (Pvt) Ltd., Sialkot. What are your feelings as the President of Sialkot Chamber of Commerce on this great achievement?**

Amongst the greatest recent achievements of Sialkot Football Industry stands the manufacturing of "Brazuca" Football, which has been declared as official match ball of the FIFA World Cup this year. This is surely a matter of great honour and pride for our country as this has resulted in projecting softer image of Pakistan at international level and would contribute to enhancement of exports from Pakistan. We invited Brazilian Ambassador to SCCI in a special ceremony to celebrate this event and urged all foreign service officers of Pakistan to celebrate and highlight this achievement to promote positive image of Pakistan.

**The Punjab Government in collaboration with SMEDA and the Sialkot Chamber of Commerce has initiated three projects i.e. a Business and Commerce Centre (BCC), Sialkot Tannery Zone (STZ) and Sports Industry Development Centre in Sialkot.**

## Would you like to share some details about these projects and how these would promote economic development in the Sialkot?

The Sialkot Business and Commerce Centre is an eight storey building project having total covered area of 101,823 sq. ft. The project has been endeavored in Public-Private Partnership between Sialkot Chamber and Federal Government through SMEDA. SBCC will promote industrial development through provision of facilities including Business Facilitation Centre, Convention Centre, Temporary Office Space Facilities, Meeting Rooms, Marketing and Library Services. The completion of Sialkot Business and Commerce Centre will open up a new era of business promotion and development in Sialkot. Development of SBCC would provide an excellent opportunity for marketing of the products being produced in Sialkot and facilitate trade and commerce by providing one stop solution to the foreign visitors while they get exposure of the market dynamics and products under one roof.

Sports Industries Development Centre (SIDC), Sialkot is a joint initiative of Ministry of Industries & Production, SMEDA and Sialkot Chamber of Commerce & Industry to help sports goods sector to adopt new technology of mechanized thermo laminated balls by providing training, common facilities and technical advisory services along with mold machinery services. The project has been visualized to facilitate in sustaining Pakistan's position in international market of inflatable balls in general and soccer balls in particular through development of prototype balls for the industry, training of skilled workers in mold / rubber technologies / mechanized thermo laminated balls, provision of manufacturing facilities for SMEs, development of quality vulcanization and pasting molds, development of imported machinery locally through reverse engineering and provision of assistance in setting up mechanized ball production lines in individual industrial units. The project is being implemented on Transfer of Technology (ToT) basis.

Sialkot Tannery Zone project would help in shifting of tanneries located in and around the city to a centralized location to provide various facilities like Common Effluent Treatment Plant, Solid Waste Disposal Site and Common Effluent Collection System. This would help in effective control of environmental hazards caused by the tanning industry in the region. It is an immensely important project ensuring compliance towards corporate social responsibility and would be instrumental in sustainable growth of the sector while addressing the environmental concerns to minimize pollution.

**What is the consensus view point of the business community about the recent political turmoil in the country? Don't you think that the ongoing political agitations, protests and unrest would have a negative**



## impact on the economic progress of the country?

Government must take all necessary measures to provide competitive edge to the local businesses to help them achieve product specialization and export competitiveness. Implementation of rational fiscal policies and provision of energy inputs at competitive rates could provide impetus for strengthening of manufacturing and export sector of the country. The state must play its role to maintain law and order to promote industrialization and attract foreign direct investment, which would ultimately help overcome social problems through alleviation of poverty and reduction of unemployment.

I blame lack of education as primary cause of the present situation. The democracy in our country is still in its inception and due time may be needed to achieve maturity. At the same time, it is a self-correcting system and make necessary adjustments itself, if allowed to continue. The present uncertain political conditions are hurting businesses and our country very badly.

**Are you satisfied with the measures taken by the government to resolve energy crisis, especially in textile industry. Has the Sialkot Chamber presented any strategy to the government in this regard?**

The exporters of Sialkot have, in the past, achieved the distinction for Sialkot as an export city. With necessary

backing of the government in the shape of assistance in marketing of the products, friendly policies, uninterrupted provision of utilities at cheaper rates, lower interest rates, efficient handling of goods at ports, cheap inland transportation and international freight, the export sector of Sialkot has the potential of multiplying its export volume. In short, the government must create an enabling environment for business to flourish and grow.

We are not satisfied by the prevailing energy situation. It is forcing us to use generators to fulfil our commitments with the international buyers, which is expensive and increases cost of production. We have constituted Committee on Power Generation to consider options to overcome this energy issue. However, generation of electricity in private sector is a costly option and cannot suit us in the present economic conditions.

**Do you think that the present government's efforts to improve economic growth; achieve industrial development and resolve energy crisis are yielding positive results? If not, where is the government lacking i.e. in policy direction; in commitment or in any other aspect?**

The Government is surely moving in the right direction to promote economic growth, achieve industrial development and resolve energy crisis. However, these efforts would bear fruit in few years' time as most of the projects are based on medium to long term planning. We have observed improvement in provision of electricity as Government has been able to curtail circular debt of IPPs and hopefully with installation and commissioning of new power projects, the problem of shortage of energy would be done away with on permanent basis and sufficient energy would be available to turn economic wheel of the country.

**The Chinese government has made an announcement for investment of around 32 billion dollars which the Punjab government intends to spend mostly in energy and textile sectors. Do you have any concrete suggestions to the government on how to better utilize this huge foreign investment?**

China is our closest ally and a friend that has always helped us in difficult times. Announcement of economic package of US \$ 32 billion by the Chinese Government is surely a gesture of goodwill for the people of Pakistan and a great achievement of the political leadership. This is a sign that our friends have strong faith in the economic policies of the Government and they want us to prosper by extending necessary financial assistance in the form of investment package. We feel that Government's decision to divert this investment towards improvement of energy and textile sector is a wise decision as both these sectors would ensure economic stability of Pakistan by strengthening

manufacturing and export sectors of Pakistan. We shall seize this opportunity to develop our country.

**Sialkot should be declared by the government as a "Cottage City" and a special package of incentives be announced for upgradation and modernization of SMEs in Sialkot. Do you agree with this statement?**

Sialkot is undoubtedly a city of cottage industry and grant of special status of "Cottage City" to Sialkot and proposal of special package of incentives for upgradation and modernization of SMEs of Sialkot is fully supported by this Chamber. We have always championed the cause of providing necessary facilitation to SMEs of Sialkot and most of the projects initiated by this Chamber in collaboration with the Government are focused on strengthening of cottage industry of Sialkot.

**The Management Accountants can offer special professional expertise to the industry in remaining cost competitive in international market by advising them techniques to cut production costs and minimize wastages in production. What role your Chamber can play to highlight their role in the trade and industry sectors?**

Academia-Industry linkages are important for combining and developing research potential of the two sectors and promoting activities for new industrial creation and innovation. Management Accountants can surely help in implementing techniques to cut production costs and as a matter of fact, the industry is already benefitting from their skills and expertise. We welcome any suggestions to further strengthen this liaison.

**What message you would like to give to the members and students of ICMA Pakistan?**

I would say that dedication, hard work and commitment are a key to success in every walk of life. We should realize our responsibilities as citizen of Pakistan and contribute towards its progress and prosperity in whatever capacity we are serving in. This is our beloved country and we should seize upon every opportunity to put it on the path of prosperity. Our efforts should be focused on pursuing national interest rather than personal gain. Job of every citizen has its own significance and everyone should perform his duty efficiently and diligently to contribute towards development of this country. May Allah guide us to the right path and endow upon us blessings of this world and the world hereafter.

**The interview ended with a vote of thanks to Dr. Sarfraz Bashir, President, The Sialkot Chamber of Commerce and Industry, who spared his valuable time and gave his candid views exclusively for this journal. — Editor**