

MFN status to India: farmers react strongly to attitude of ministers

MUSHTAQ GHUMMAN ISLAMABAD (January 07, 2013) : Farmers have reacted strongly to the attitude of Foreign Minister Ms Hina Rabbani Khar, and Minister for Information Qamar Zaman Kaira for arguing in favour of Most Favoured Nation (MFN) status to India in a recent meeting of federal cabinet. "We feel that both Ministers are more loyal than the king in pushing for MFN to India without realising its negative impacts on the agriculture sector", said Hamid Malhi, President Basmati Growers Association. In an exclusive chat with *Business Recorder* he said that MFN issue is important for agriculturists because there is no mechanism in place to resist the onslaught of subsidised agri products from India. "How can a person who has managed to arrange staggered repayments of overdue electricity bills of millions of rupees of her husband, be so active in the MFN issue which clearly favours India, it just can't be, unless it is a policy for her personal gain of elevation in the next government. She is not the Trade and Commerce Minister! Why is she bothered more about India than Pakistan?" he questioned. He said that the government of Pakistan should not be pushing its agriculture into a dungeon. "Why was the agriculture community, the producers contributing 23 percent to the GDP not consulted all along? Why was the cabinet misguided and misinformed into believing that all sectors had been taken into confidence," he continued. According to him, a cabinet decision based on misrepresentation of facts has to be reviewed and the culprits hiding in the Commerce Ministry or any other Ministry should be brought to book. He questioned the plans for protecting the country's agriculture from the subsidized Indian onslaught? There is not a single agriculture item on the negative list or the sensitive list of Pakistan's imports from India, except Tobacco and its different forms. Farmers argue that this is a cruel joke against agriculture, which is heavily taxed in the country. RGST at the rate of 16 percent on all agricultural inputs has been levied for the last two years. The electricity rates have also gone up and so have HSD prices. The fertilizer prices in India are 4-5 times lower than in Pakistan. "Is this a level-playing field? Is this free and fair trade? In which paradise is the Minister of Foreign Affairs living in? Farmers request the President Asif Ali Zardari to look into the matter as some of his ministers are trying to defeat the government's overall policy objective of development and self-sufficiency in agriculture," he continued. In an interview with AAJ News programme "Paisa Bolta Hay" aired on Sunday, Hamid Malhi said that farmers will be on the roads in protest if the government grants MFN status to India.

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