

Cross-LoC trade: Two set of norms for Kashmir, Jammu regions

Govt allows 50 trucks from Kashmir to PoK, just 25 from Jammu

Ravi Krishnan Khajuria/TNS

JAMMU, MAY 11

In the special state of Jammu and Kashmir, none other than the government seems to be scuttling the biggest confidence-building measure between India and Pakistan — the trans-LoC trade.

It's official, the state government has two different norms for the two regions — Jammu and Kashmir.

On trading days, the government allows 50 trucks per day from Salamabad in Uri district of Kashmir to ferry merchandise to Chakoti in Pak-occupied Kashmir (PoK) but the number comes down to 25 trucks when it comes to Chakan-da-Bagh in Poonch district of the Jammu region. This is done despite the fact that the distance between Salamabad and Chakoti is 25 km and between Chakan-da-Bagh and Tetrinote in PoK is just 1.5 km.

Further, the trade-related infrastructure at Chakan-da-Bagh in Poonch district is far better than what exists in Salamabad.

Trade from both routes — Salamabad and Chakan-da-Bagh — takes place four days in a week from Tuesday to Friday.

"We allow 50 trucks per day



A vehicle carrying merchandise across the LoC in Poonch

DRAWING PARALLELS

- On trading days, the state government allows 50 trucks per day from Salamabad in Uri district of Kashmir to ferry merchandise to Chakoti in PoK.
- Just 25 trucks are allowed from Chakan-da-Bagh in Poonch district of Jammu region to Tetrinote in PoK.
- The distance between Salamabad and Chakoti is 25 km, while that between Chakan-da-Bagh and Tetrinote is just 1.5 km.
- Trade-related infrastructure at Chakan-da-Bagh is better than that in Salamabad.

on trading days from Salamabad to Chakoti in PoK," said Nazir Ahmed Baba, custodian of Cross LoC Trade Facilitation Centre at Salamabad.

Baba disclosed that unlike the Chakan-da-Bagh route where exports have been confined to just dry chilli, cross-LoC traders in Kashmir continue to export red chilli, chilli seeds, medicinal herbs and embroidery products to PoK traders.

Sources, however, told The Tribune that apart from the above items, green car-

damom, big cardamom and fresh fruits were also being exported from Salamabad to Chakoti.

In 2008, New Delhi under the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) had given its consent to Indian traders to export 21 different items to PoK. Three years later, the trade via Chakan-da-Bagh in Poonch has come down to just chilli.

Sometimes the authorities concerned in Salamabad even allow 60 to 70 trucks to Chakoti, said Rajinder Vaid, a

cross-LoC trader.

"If Jammu and Kashmir is one state and the cross-LoC trade is the biggest CBM between India and Pakistan then why are the cross-LoC traders at Poonch being given a raw deal? Why has this government adopted different norms for two regions of the state?" Vaid asked.

Initially, when the trade had started from Chakan-da-Bagh, the authorities used to allow 50 to 55 trucks but for the past two years they have not only confined the trade to chilli but have also reduced the number of trucks to 25, he said.

Another trader, who wished anonymity, said cross-LoC traders of Jammu had taken up the issue with Industries and Commerce Minister SS Salathia and Health Minister Sham Lal Sharma, but they, too, did nothing.

Salathia, however, attributed the difference to "requirements" of the trade. "This has been done as per the requirements of the trade but we have already taken up the issue with the Union government," he said.

When reminded that two years ago the government had been allowing 50 to 55 trucks per day on trading days from Chakan-da-Bagh, the Minister assured that the issue would be sorted out shortly.