

# Uzbekistan keen to boost business ties with Punjab

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Chandigarh, Apr 28 Uzbekistan has expressed interest in furthering business and trade ties with Punjab, particularly in the areas of agriculture, education and tourism.

Uzbekistan's ambassador to India Farhod Arziev met Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh here today, and discussed cooperation in areas of mutual interest for the benefit of both India and the Central Asian country, said an official release.

The chief minister suggested export of various commodities, including wheat and rice, to Uzbekistan, pointing out that the direct air connectivity with Uzbekistan and Amritsar (Punjab) offered vast potential for trade promotion.

Farhod Arziev said Uzbekistan was also keen to utilise the air route to further bolster trade in fresh fruits, such as mulberry, apricot and peaches, as well as dry fruits that were organically produced in his country".

Passenger and cargo flights from Chennai to Uzbekistan could also be used to exploit the trade potential, said the envoy, also inviting Punjab to see the cotton plantations in his country, as they were keen to export cotton to India.

A suggestion was made during the meeting by Finance Minister Manpreet Badal to host exchange programmes for students from Punjab Agriculture University (PAU).

Singh asked his officials to explore the possibility of knowledge sharing and transfer of agricultural technologies in coordination with the Uzbek embassy.

Citing the deep shared roots of India and Uzbekistan, the envoy also called for joint promotion of religious and heritage tourism, pointing out that Bukhara, which the first Sikh Guru Nanak Dev was believed to have visited, had various historical sites of interest to the Sikh community.

Singh and Farhod Arziev agreed to explore the heritage tourism potential offered by the two regions in order to promote the industry.

Earlier, the visiting ambassador apprised the chief minister of his government's intent to play a key role in India's connectivity initiatives in the resource-rich and strategically important Central Asia.

Evincing keen interest in supplying fertilisers to Punjab, the ambassador said that the opening of Chabahar port would result in another avenue for boosting his country's trade share with India via the Iran route.

The envoy also suggested establishment of a joint hospital, as a private sector enterprise, in Tashkent, an official spokesperson said after the meeting. The chief minister agreed to look into the suggestion.

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