[Senator Lt gen Abdul Qayyum](https://www.thenews.com.pk/writer/senator-lt-gen-abdul-qayyum)

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**Window of opportunity**

The Commonwealth is an apolitical association of 54 member states which was founded under the Balfour Declaration in 1926 and formally constituted by the London Declaration in 1949 with its headquarters in London. It includes all territories of the former British Empire, which have about 2.5 billion in population and approximately worth ten trillion dollars as an economy.

The Commonwealth's secretariat deals with intergovernmental issues while its foundation focuses on non-governmental relations between the member states. It is headed by Queen Elizabeth-II. The purpose behind creating the Commonwealth was two fold: to advance democracy and human rights, and to aid economic development. Pakistan became its member in 1947, departed in 1972 due to the UK's unfortunate partisan role in the 1971 Indo-Pak war, and re-joined this prestigious forum again in 1989.

A dynamic Pakistani businessman, Mobin Rafiq, who is the co-founder and chairman of the Global Trade Partnership (GTP) took a big initiative and established the Commonwealth Entrepreneurs Club (CEC) to promote trade and boost economic activities among the member states. Mobin Rafiq, who is the chairman of the CEC, is an illustrious technocrat, successful industrialist and renowned philanthropist with forty years of manufacturing experience and business relations with many industrial magnets and billionaire entrepreneurs in all economically prosperous Commonwealth member states including Canada, Australia and the UK, India and South Africa.

Mobin Rafiq published several reports on self-sustaining micro cities, industrial parks and low cast housing schemes as vehicles and growth enablers for trade and entrepreneurship. He has dedicated his life to help SMEs. It is also important to note that all members of the CEC, from different Commonwealth states, are prominent leaders from business, education and governments. Their expertise spans construction, industrial parks, manufacturing, mining, property, agriculture, food, health, services, affordable houses, tourism, vocational training and education.

Since Commonwealth trading potential is colossal, Pakistan can immensely benefit by promoting trade and collaborations with different Commonwealth states to alleviate poverty through creation of jobs via foreign investments. It is for this reason that I accepted the offer by him to join this prestigious club as president of its Pakistan chapter.

The CEC has leading organisations, experts and practitioners who can assist Pakistani entrepreneurs in their different ventures. It is implementing projects and industrial parks in Nigeria through public private partnerships (PPP). We encourage various entrepreneurs to not only seek membership of the CEC but also take active part in promoting multilateral trade and economic interaction which will give members global network access, network advice, free consultancy, PPP and market insight, access to new markets through annual events in London for greater interaction to promote trade and generate economic activities.

As patron of the Pakistan Youth Parliament (PYP), it was my desire to give global exposure to our young entrepreneurs. The chairman of the CEC graciously agreed to club the PYP with the CEC for the said purpose. It is also heartening to note that the visionary chairman of the CEC, who is also co-founder and chairman of the GTP, is also planning to link the CEC with global trade activities – thus opening new commercial, trade and business avenues for all Commonwealth member states including Pakistan.

Every patriotic Pakistani must have heaved a sigh of relief when a person no less than the prime minister of Pakistan himself tweeted that our state economy was picking up. We pray it does. However, when one sees that the size of our economy has shrunk in the last two and a half years from $315 billion to $264 billion, the GDP is heading towards negative growth, job opportunities have vanished, not a single SOE has shown any improvement – in fact these have further deteriorated with their swollen circular debts by more than hundred percent – employees of these SOEs are being laid off, inflation and energy costs have skyrocketed, one takes the honourable prime minister’s claims with a pinch of salt.

The PM, however, has recently candidly confessed that his party had not been prepared to rule a country like Pakistan which has immense internal and external challenges. That surely shows that the PTI manifesto had no relevance to ground realities. It was merely a paper exercise prepared by a few members of the party who did not have the foggiest idea about statecraft. As a result, the nation witnessed big claims of eliminating corruption in ninety days, building five million houses, creating ten million jobs, bringing two hundred billion dollars of looted money from abroad in no time and so on.

Another development which is worrisome is the cold shouldering by some of our extremely trusted allies like Saudi Arabia and the UAE. This is a real diplomatic disaster and points towards our failure of diplomacy. Greater trade and economic interaction with not only the Commonwealth states but also with the OIC, ECO, EU and SCO can not only take Pakistan out of the present economic mess but also break our diplomatic isolation because vital economic interests bind various states.

Pakistan, as we all know, is a land of opportunities for foreign investors. In tourism alone, billions of dollars of investments can be attracted if we do proper marketing in different states including Commonwealth countries. As a state, Pakistan undoubtedly has tremendous potential to join the world's top twenty economies – provided the leadership has the vision to set long, medium and short-term attainable goals and shows the desired political will to pursue these goals with determination. For this, the country needs competent and committed teams for effective governance, superior economic management and proactive targeted exterior manoeuvres. It is very possible – if we show determination to make full use of all important forums like the Commonwealth.

The writer is chairman Senate Standing Committee on Defence Production.