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## Pakistan, China may sign deal for investment in agriculture

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# Pakistan, China may sign deal for investment in agriculture

Under the agreement, surplus produce will be exported to China

By Shahbaz Rana

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**ISLAMABAD:** Pakistan and China may sign a legal framework agreement under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), aimed at bringing investment in the neglected agriculture sector and exporting surplus produce to feed the growing Chinese population.

Both sides were aiming to sign the deal during the visit of Prime Minister Imran Khan to China early next month, said officials in the Ministry of Planning and the Ministry of National Food Security.

If finalised, it would be a government-to-government sovereign deal, developed on the parameters of legal framework agreement in the energy sector, officials added. The major thrust of the agreement will be on enhancing production of the agriculture sector and exporting the surplus produce to China, they added.

Chinese companies may give buy-back guarantees to farmers for the purchase of grains and food aimed at protecting them from losses, the officials said and added that Chinese investment would be allowed in joint ventures but they may not be allowed to buy land.

The development comes at a time when the \$60-billion CPEC deals are increasingly becoming the subject of western criticism and may soon be opened for scrutiny by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

### Improved CPEC design is in interest of all

The quantum of investment in the agriculture sector has not yet been discussed, but it will be “huge”, according to an official in the Ministry of National Food Security.

A Chinese delegation, led by MA Aiguo, Vice Minister for Agriculture and Rural Affairs, is currently visiting Pakistan to finalise modalities for the framework agreement. The delegation met with Federal Minister for Planning and Development Makhdoom Khusro Bakhtyar on Monday.

Joint ventures, value addition, cold chain management for fruits and vegetables, marketing and branding would help Pakistan overcome weaknesses and increase agriculture exports to China and other countries, said Bakhtyar. He emphasised that there was a massive potential for developing Pakistan’s agriculture sector and achieve a win-win situation.

China and Pakistan should give full play to their own competitive advantages to strengthen agriculture infrastructure construction with CPEC coverage and play their roles in agriculture personnel training, technical exchange and cooperation, says the CPEC Long

Term Plan (2017-30).

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Under the plan, both countries have committed to cooperate in areas of biological breeding, production, processing, storage and transportation, infrastructure construction, disease prevention and control, water resources utilisation, conservation and land development and remediation.

They have also committed to market agricultural products for the promotion of systematic, large-scale standardised and intensified construction of the agriculture industry, according to the plan.

Pakistan's agriculture sector employs 45% of the manpower, contributes about 24% to gross domestic product, provides livelihood for 64% of the country's rural population and contributes 20% to total exports, according to Bakhtyar.

The minister said Pak-China agricultural cooperation had to focus on the vertical increase in productivity of existing crops, transfer of knowledge and technologies, seed and plant protection as well as disease control.

He also underlined the importance of value addition and marketing of agriculture products, including dairy, livestock and fisheries. Mutual cooperation should cover the whole basket of the agriculture sector, he added.

MA Aiguo said agricultural cooperation should set a new and important direction with focus on areas as well as level of cooperation and finalisation of specific plans, according to a statement issued by the planning ministry. He said China was ready to share its expertise and successful agriculture models with Pakistan.

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