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Punjab CM Pledges Support for Australian Investment

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Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz Sharif has pledged full support for Australian investors, highlighting the province's readiness to expand cooperation across multiple economic sectors. The remarks came during a farewell meeting in Lahore with Australian High Commissioner Neil Hawkins on August 9, 2025.

According to *The Express Tribune*, Sharif praised the role of the Pakistani diaspora in Australia in strengthening bilateral ties and promoting trade. She assured that the Punjab

government would provide targeted support for Australian businesses in sectors such as information technology, tourism, textiles, food processing, and minerals.

The meeting also discussed collaboration under the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC), a federal initiative designed to streamline foreign investment procedures. Sharif emphasized the value of technology transfer, particularly in agriculture and livestock, where Australia holds recognized expertise. She noted that improving cold chain logistics for aquaculture and fisheries imports could open new opportunities for trade, referencing a recent Australian agricultural delegation's visit to Pakistan in July 2025, reported by *Business Recorder*.

While primarily focused on trade and investment, the discussion also touched on shared development priorities, with both sides agreeing on the importance of sustainable growth. Sharif described Punjab as a favorable investment destination, offering tax exemptions, special industrial zones, and policy stability.

Trade between Pakistan and Australia has historically been modest but growing. According to official data, bilateral trade exceeded USD 1 billion in 2024, driven largely by Pakistan's exports of textiles and rice, and Australia's supply of pulses, oilseeds, and educational services. Australian universities remain a popular choice for Pakistani students, adding a valuable educational exchange dimension to the relationship.

Sharif also encouraged Australian firms to explore opportunities in Punjab's burgeoning IT sector, where the province has launched initiatives to boost software exports and establish technology parks. The tourism sector, with Punjab's heritage sites and emerging hospitality infrastructure, was presented as another area for collaboration.

In a separate statement carried by *The Tribune International*, Punjab Assembly Speaker Malik Muhammad Ahmad Khan reinforced the importance of parliamentary engagement alongside economic cooperation. He noted that strengthened legislative ties could help create a predictable investment climate.

The farewell meeting marked the conclusion of Neil Hawkins' tenure as Australia's top diplomat in Pakistan. Sharif commended his contributions to strengthening bilateral relations and expressed optimism that the momentum built during his service would continue under his successor.

With its growing urban economy, skilled labor force, and strategic location, Punjab is positioning itself as a competitive destination for foreign investment. The provincial government's proactive approach, coupled with targeted incentives, signals its intent to attract global investors seeking long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships.

As Pakistan works to expand its economic footprint in the Asia-Pacific region, stronger ties with Australia could serve as a platform for trade diversification, agricultural modernization, and technology-driven growth — aligning with Punjab's vision for sustainable economic development.