

PAKISTAN FREEZES PLAN TO OPEN IMPORTS FROM INDIA

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A file photo of an Indian truck with goods at the Wagah border.AP

The reversal of the ECC's decision on Thursday was announced by Pakistan Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi, who, in a taped video statement, said the matter needed "further debate".

"An impression was emerging that ties with India are moving towards normalisation and trade has been opened. We had a discussion on this, and the unanimous view of the Cabinet was that until the unilateral decisions taken by India on August 5, 2019, are not reconsidered, it would be impossible to normalise relations with India," Mr. Qureshi said.

According to media reports in Pakistan, Mr. Qureshi, along with Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid and Human Rights Minister Shireen Mazari, were most vocal in their opposition to reopening trade with India.

Ms. Mazaari had tweeted against the decision on Indian imports hours before the Cabinet meeting, indicating that there were differences within the Cabinet.

"Cabinet stated clearly NO trade with India," Ms. Mazaari emphasised in a tweet after the meeting on Thursday, referring to India's "illegal actions" in Jammu and Kashmir. Mr. Rashid told the media that India's decision to overturn Article 370 was the precondition for any engagement.

While New Delhi has made it clear that it will not reverse decisions on Article 370 from a slew of measures taken in August 2019, both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah have publicly said that the Statehood of Jammu and Kashmir, which has been downgraded to a Union Territory at present, would be restored at an "appropriate" time.

The Ministry of External Affairs declined to comment, both on the earlier decision to open imports, and the latest one to defer any easing of trade ties.

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