

Mumbai visa office 'must' for trade, Canada PM urged

With Canada under threat from the economic crash in its biggest trading partner - the US, the Canada-India Business Council (C-IBC) has sought diversification of the nation's trade to countries like India to survive in a global economy.

It has written to Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper to open a new visa office in [Mumbai](#) at the earliest to boost trade with India.

The demand by the apex business body, which represents Canadian giants like Bombardier, RIM and Scotiabank, comes in the wake of Ottawa's decision to open new trade offices in Hyderabad, [Kolkata](#) and Ahmedabad.

In a letter to the prime minister, C-IBC chairman Roy MacLaren has said that a visa office in Mumbai was a must to give a fillip to the two-way trade - currently pegged at \$4.1 billion.

MacLaren said, 'These additional trade officers in leading business centres will help respond to the growing interest in doing business in both countries.'

But the process of obtaining Canadian visas also needs to be expedited to realise the full potential of economic relationship, he said.

'This is particularly the case for businessmen and investors living in Mumbai and other cities in the south of India who currently are obliged to apply through the High Commission in New Delhi,' said MacLaren.

'This is a cumbersome and time-consuming process which frustrates businessmen who often need to arrange a trip on short notice. It can also deter potential investors who must be assured of easy and prompt access to their investments.'

Giving an example, he said many Indian business people opted out of the Indian Merchants Chamber delegation which visited Canada recently as they had to go to Delhi for visas.

'Mumbai is India's business capital and is better situated than [New Delhi](#) to service the cities where we now have trade offices, as well as other rapidly growing commercial centres in south India,' said the C-IBC chairman.

Winnipeg Chamber of Commerce chairman Hemant Shah, who launched the Mumbai visa office campaign 12 years ago, said, 'In light of the US meltdown, India will be only place for outsourcing from North America. BlackBerry CEO was right when he said that India is going to be the future market for Canada.'

'We have no complaints against the Canadian mission in Delhi, but Canada has to expedite visa processing.'

Gurmukh Singh (© IANS / India eNews)