

Businesses urged to cash in on Bahrain-US FTA

American expert exhorts SMEs to help each other

K.V.S. Madhav

American expert on small and medium enterprise businesses, Dr. Sharon Freeman yesterday underlined the need for Bahraini and US businesses to help each other to make optimum utilisation of the Free Trade Agreement in the current tumultuous economic climate.

"We need to forge greater linkages. And we need smarter help from both sides," she said, speaking at the Bahrain Society of Engineers yesterday.

Bahrain, she said, had

greater net gains than United States in the two-way trade. Exports by Bahrain last year to the United States were to the tune of \$800 million, predominantly in fertilisers, apparel and some industrial products while it was only \$500 million in the other way.

"We are lowering prices and removing obstacles, but we need to do a lot more. We also have an access vehicle in the form of the Free Trade Agreement, but greater dialogue is the need of the hour between SMEs in both the nations. This include a high-end Internet interface with

specific industry, product and services-based information on both the nations," she suggested.

United States had 14 FTAs in vogue and 40 per cent of its exports were to the FTA partners. "However, this is quite a smaller base with 215,000 exporters from the enormous 27.2 million small firms."

On the other hand, competition had turned fierce and SMEs were feeling the pressure from the emergence of China and India and also the revival of protectionism in Europe by way of non-tariff barriers.



NOOR MOHAMED

BILATERAL RELATIONS: Sharon Freeman.