

**Traders across Punjab protest against budgetary measures**

LAHORE: A large number of traders representing various associations and chambers across the province have termed the current economic situation as the worst ever in the country's history.

While sharing their views at 'Tajir Bachao Conference' held at Aiwan-i-Iqbal Complex on Friday, they said the government should work on ease of doing business instead of creating hurdles on the pretext of tax collection.

They sought immediate withdrawal of the 17 per cent sales tax on zero-rated sectors and the CNIC-based invoicing system.

"You [Prime Minister Imran Khan] had promised to end poverty. But you are eliminating poor people through such unjustified budgets. So we reject this budget made by bureaucracy and the International Monetary Fund," said Pakistan Traders Alliance's Lahore Chief Nasir Hameed.

"Why are you people not ready to understand [that] when there will be no business, how you will collect the tax," he questioned.

As many as 2,500 representatives from various associations of Islamabad, Gujranwala, Faisalabad, Sahiwal, Okara, Khanewal, Rahim Yar Khan, Multan, Bahawalpur, DG Khan, Jhelum, Bhakkar and Sargodha gathered at the venue.

The representatives held placards and banners inscribed with their demands. While chanting slogans during convention's proceedings, they criticised the government for introducing anti-business policy.

"The government is crushing us. How you will improve economic situation of this country in this way?" asked Mian Attique, a trade association president while addressing the participants.

"The government will face countrywide protests amid closure of business in all parts, if it continues behaving in the same way," he warned.

Nasir Hameed said that he received calls during convention from the PM Office as well as the provincial minister for industry. "Through calls, I was conveyed to stay calm as the Federal Board of Revenue chairman will reach Lahore on Saturday (today) to hear and resolve our issues," he told Dawn.

FPCCI slammed: Busine-ssmen Panel (BMP) Secretary General and Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) former president Senator Ghulam Ali said the withdrawal zero-rated regime will badly affect our exports especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs) sectors, and widen the trade deficit at the cost of ballooning current account gap.

In a statement he asked, “how can we accept the government’s decision in which buyers need to pay an additional 3pc tax for selling goods to non-filers, besides showing CNIC numbers of purchasers. “Manufacturers, importers, distributors and wholesalers need to write CNIC number of the purchaser on the bill while they will collect the amount exceeding Rs50,000 via cheque after Finance Bill 2019 went into effect?”

The BMP official said at one side, traders, commerce chambers and associations are on protest against the business unfriendly finance bill and on other side, FPCCI and its office bearers have a silent lip on their mouths, sitting idle with no plan of action how to come out of this situation.

“Today FPCCI are equally responsible of this unrest in the business circles because they failed to plead the case of the business community in front of the government before budget,” he added.

Ali further said the business community is protesting in all major cities across the country but FPCCI officials are involved in an intense power struggle which is damaging the institution since last two to three years.

Similarly, the government is also not ready to give them any importance.

He also criticised that the United Business Group came to power in the affairs of the FPCCI promising a change but unfortunately it has pushed the apex trade body to new lows which has lost its credibility in the eyes of the business community and the government, he added.

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