

**Twin cities' traders to join other cities in shutter-down strike**

ISLAMABAD: The traders of Rawalpindi and Islamabad will join the rest of the country in observing a shutter-down strike on July 13 against taxation measures adopted in the 2019-20 budget.

Unlike similar occasions in the recent past, all groups in the retail sector have unanimously decided to strike and a consensus has been reached among traders from all over the country.

“After all efforts failed to convince the government to look into our concerns, we organised a kind of all parties conference belonging to the traders’ community in Lahore on July 5,” All Pakistan Markazi Anjuman-i-Tijaran President Ajmal Baloch said.

That meeting decided that traders needed to unite under one agenda and avoid conflict amongst themselves. All groups are free to initiate efforts, hang banners or hold press conferences to make the strike successful.

“The issue is that the government is only interested in discussing issues and problems facing industrialists. The statement given is that the premier or whoever will hold discussions with the business community but they always fail to understand that traders too are part of the business chain, although we are small players,” he said.

Support for July 13 strike call has been extended by traders from major cities

The decision was reached after negotiations between the Markazi Anjuman-i-Tijaran and the government on July 1 and 2 failed.

Traders from this group even blocked the gates of the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) in the Red Zone on July 1, and authorities assured them their concerns would be taken up.

Support for the strike call on July 13 has been extended by traders from major cities including Karachi, Lahore and Faisalabad.

Leaders from several groups, including Traders Action Committee Islamabad Information Secretary Khalid Chaudhry and Markazi Tanzeem Tajiran Pakistan’s Mohammad Kashif, visited various markets in the capital to woo traders to join the strike.

A meeting of local traders was also held in Sitara Market, where it was decided that the traders would also visit the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

Speakers said the shutter-down strike was neither a political issue nor against the government, but against the anti-trader tax measures dictated by the International Monetary Fund and adopted in the budget.

They said the FBR chairman had previously advised large industrialists on how to avoid paying taxes and now wanted to bring people into the tax net within days, which was not feasible.

Khalid Chaudhry said the government should train people on tax matters and raise awareness about paying taxes, but no such effort was made even when the amnesty scheme was initiated by the previous government, which led to the scheme failing.

He said that the government has handed over budget matters to the IMF without reforming the FBR.

The traders have adopted a six-point charter of demands which has been forwarded to the FBR, and a response to which is awaited.

The demands include the withdrawal of the now mandatory condition of noting a buyer's identity card number and a 1.5pc tax on turnover, which they believe should be charged on profits only. They have also sought a fixed tax regime for retailers, an exemption from tax registrations for wholesalers and retailers and for sales tax to be recovered at the manufacturing and import stage.

Kalbe Ali