

Traders call for nationwide strike today—Karachi divided

THE first big test of the PTI government and its budget could shape up today as traders bodies from around the country have issued a nationwide strike call. There are hundreds of trader associations in Pakistan, and millions of traders who participate in the retail sector. Some groups have rallied hard around the strike call for many days now, yet till the last minute on Friday night it was not clear how far the call will be observed. Traders bodies from Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Peshawar and Quetta say they intend to observe the strike call today. Many important groups, however, announced they will not participate. The main chambers of commerce and industry, from Karachi to Lahore and other cities of Punjab, also did not support the call. Today will show how far the traders are able to forge unity within their ranks.

KARACHI: A rift emerged among traders in the city on Friday ahead of a countrywide strike call given by various organisations for July 13, 2019 under the umbrella of the Markazi Tanzeeme Tajiran Pakistan (MTTP) and All Pakistan Anjuman-e-Tajiran. A number of small groups under the Karachi Tajir Action Committee (KTAC), representing various markets, have decided to keep their shutters open.

Prior to this, various market based bodies had united on one platform to give a tough response against the budget.

To gain support of Karachi traders, President MTTP Kashif Chaudhry held a press conference at Karachi Press Club on Thursday, soliciting support from traders for the strike call.

Kashif claimed to have received support from representatives of over 400 markets of Karachi which included Saddar, Tariq Road, Clifton, Defence, Liaquatabad, M.A. Jinnah Road markets, Gul Plaza, Timber and furniture markets, iron and steel markets, auto parts, cloth markets, Landhi, Korangi, Malir and Garden Area markets.

Contrary to this, representatives of the KTAC on Friday announced their deviation from Saturday's countrywide shut down.

At a hurriedly called press conference at Karachi Press Club (KPC) on Friday, KTAC members vowed to keep their markets and shops open.

Giving details, one of the members of KTAC, Mohammad Sharjeel Gopalani claimed that "95 per cent of Karachi markets will remain open on Saturday."

"There is no pressure of any kind on KTAC members for opening the markets," he said, adding that the government was willing to talk to the traders and the latest round of talks had gone well. However, he did not specify who the government had sent to deal with the traders.

"Our negotiations with the government representatives on Thursday have been successful in which 10 out of the 11 demands have been agreed by the officials."

Only the CNIC issue has been left on which Member Tax Policy Inland Revenue had clarified in detail in print media on Friday.

He said government officials had agreed to resolve the issues by arranging meetings of KTAC members with National Tariff Commission (NTC), Member Inland Revenue FBR, Commerce Ministry and Finance Ministry since for many matters the FBR needs to coordinate with these departments.

Another member of the KTAC, Ahmed Shamsi said markets including Jama Cloth, Medicine market, Bohri Bazar Saddar, Sarafa Market, used car dealers showrooms, Light House, Khalid Bin Waleed Road, Jodia Bazar, Timber Market, Iron and Steel Market, Ranchore Line, Lee Market, Lyari area markets, Hyderi markets, Gulf Shopping Centre at Clifton, few markets of Tariq Road and Liaquatabad market will remain open on Saturday.

“I am sure that 65-70pc markets of Karachi will do their business as usual,” he claimed adding some market traders are trying to mislead the trading community, thus pressuring traders to close their businesses amid ongoing negotiations with the government.

In contrast, President Karachi Electronic Dealers Association (KEDA), Mohammad Rizwan Irfan, who was one of the main members of KTAC, said the electronic market intended to observe the strike.

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