

Traders protest across country against tax measures

KARACHI: Barring Karachi and Faisalabad where a partial strike was observed by traders and business community, markets across the country remained closed on Saturday in protest against what was described as unfriendly budget and tax measures adopted by the federal government on the demand of International Monetary Fund (IMF).

While no incident of violence was reported from across the country during the strike, All-Karachi Tajir Ittehad estimated a trade loss of Rs4 billion with a claim of 90 per cent market closure in the metropolis and a countrywide trade loss of around Rs50bn.

‘The whole Pakistan business was shut up to 95 per cent, as the traders across the country showed their unity against the unjustified taxes and a very complicated taxation mechanism introduced by the FBR. Our immediate demand is that the government sit with us in presence of a highly qualified chartered accountant, hear us and either prove its decision justified or withdraw them,’ said All Pakistan Anjuman Tajran (APAT) president Naeem Mir.

‘And if the government doesn’t reach us to resolve the issue, we will have no option finally to launch along march on Islamabad, he warned.

While similar warnings echoed in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the twin cities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi, traders and business community in Karachi and Faisalabad were divided on the issue.

Already struggling to attract customers hit by high inflation, traders demanded the government simplify tax procedure, withdraw additional taxes, end the condition of buyers’ identification through CNIC and stop harassment of traders in the name of tax collection.

Many shops displayed banners inscribed with slogans such as ‘IMF-dictated budget and Federal Board of Revenue’s unfriendly business policies unacceptable’.

The entire Punjab business almost came to a halt as most of the markets, shopping centres and bazaars observed a shutdown on the call of various traders’ associations and groups against the imposition of new taxes. Besides Lahore, other major cities where complete strike was observed included Multan, D.G. Khan, Rahim Yar Khan, Gujranwala, Jhelum, Gujrat, Muzaffargarh, Sialkot and Sahiwal.

However, there were reports that in Faisalabad and Karachi, some major markets didn’t follow the strike call and kept doing their business as usual.

Traders representing various trade associations, which were under one umbrella of Karachi Tajir Action Committee (KTAC) against the harsh budgetary measures, had split in groups. President of the Karachi Electronic Dealers Association (KEDA) Mohammad Irfan Rizwan, who parted ways with the KTAC, said that 80pc market closure in Karachi showed that traders had totally rejected the budget 2019-20.

All-Karachi Tajir Ittehad (AKTI) chairman Atig Mir said traders were against the way the government intended to implement taxation measures by putting additional burden on consumers. `We will form a committee of traders to meet an FBR team next week so that taxation issue could be resolved,` he added.

A complete shutdown was observed in Hyderabad, Sukkur, Jacobabad, Naushahro Feroze and Larkana districts, while a partial strike was observed in Mirpurkhas district. But the protest in Khairpur and some other districts remained ineffective.

Traders and business community of Islamabad and Rawalpindi also observed a complete shutdown against the new taxation measures adopted in the budget.

President of Anjuman Tajran, Rawalpindi, Shahid Ghafoor Paracha said: `If the government fails to accept our demands, the traders will stage a sit-in in every city.` He warned the traders would go for a three-day shutdown and a countrywide wheel jam in the next phase.

`Today`s shutter down is the beginning of a series of strikes in case government did not pay serious attention towards solution of our demands,` said Faiz Mohammad Faizi, President of the Sarhad Chamber of Commerce and Industry, as the business community in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, too, responded positively to the strike call.

Visitors to several tourist areas found no food and beverages due to the strike. Traders kept their business closed in Abbottabad, Murree, Manshera, Haripur, Nowshera, Swabi, Kohat, Battagram, Dera Ismail Khan, Karak, Timergara, Lakki Marwat, Shangla and Chitral.

In Balochistan, a complete shutdown was observed.

Markets in Quetta, Mastung, Kalat, Khuzdar, Dera Murad Jamali, Chaman, Loralai and other cities also remained shut.

Aamir Shafaat Khan from Karachi, Khalid Hasnain from Lahore, Aamir Yasin from Rawalpindi, Abid Abbasi from Murree, Ali Hazrat Bacha from Peshawar, Saleem Shahid from Quetta and Zahiruddin from Chitral contributed to this report.

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