

Khalid Iqbal & Muhammad Anis

Traders go on two-day shutter down strike today

ISLAMABAD: Traders across the country have warned to extend the shutter down strike for an indefinite period if the government and the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) did not revise 'policies against the traders.'

The Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Lahore, Faisalabad and Karachi Chambers of Commerce & Industry have strongly favoured a countrywide shutter down strike of the business community. They appealed to Prime Minister Imran Khan to consider the difficulties of the business community. The business activities in the country would remain closed for two days on October 29, Tuesday (today) and October 30 Wednesday against the 'anti-traders policies' of the PTI government. Strongly denouncing the government policies against them, the traders community warned of launching an indefinite countrywide shutter down strike if the FBR did not stop 'the anti-traders policies.'

The All Pakistan Traders Association (APTA) President, Ajmal Baloch, said the prerequisite of the Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC) for purchase is unacceptable, daring the government to go ahead with whatever action it wanted. The government is assuring us of giving relaxations but does not issue proper notification. Therefore, we will observe a complete shutter down strike for two days, he said. The Rawalpindi Traders Association representatives Shahid Ghafoor Paracha and Sharjeel Mir and Cantonment Traders Association representatives Sheikh Hafeez and Arshad Awan said they would keep all markets and bazaars closed in response at the call of their central association. They alleged that the government and FBR are targeting the business community and harassing taxpayers instead of expanding the tax net. They said the traders play a major role in any country's economy and all the governments give them incentives and provide them with conducive environment for doing business. The President Qaumi Tajir Ittehad, Naeem Mir, said the present government is creating difficulties for the business community, adding the FBR should review its policies otherwise the strike could go beyond two days. He asked Prime Minister Imran Khan to play his role to resolve their problems.

The President, Pakistan Anjuman-e-Tajran, Khalid Pervaiz warned they will not open business activities till the acceptance of their demands. Prime Minister Imran Khan is not considering country's problems including ever-increasing inflation, unemployment, poverty ratio, street crime etc. He urged the government to introduce fixed tax for small traders. Strongly criticising the FBR, Pervez added the Supreme Court has already observed that the 22,000 officials of the Tax Department are a hurdle to tax collection. The All Pakistan Electronics Association, Jeweler Association, Car Dealers Association, Furniture Association, Marble Association and Merchant Association have also announced to observe complete shutter down strike on Tuesday (today) and Wednesday.

Meanwhile addressing a press conference here, President of Markazi Tanzeem-e-Tajran, Muhammad Kashif Chaudhry and other leaders said the traders would observe shutter down strike on October 29 and 30 to express their lack of confidence in economic and taxation policies of the government. They threatened to extend their countrywide two-day shutter down strike to October 31 if the government did not accept their demands. Other traders' leaders including Chaudhry Iqbal, Zia Ahmad Raja, Khurshid Qureshi and others were also present. Kashif Chaudhry said traders would observe a historic shutter down strike from Khyber to Gwadar. Thanks to the IMF policies, he said the government is moving towards confrontation with traders. He said the government concedes that the condition of CNIC and fixed tax has worried the traders' community but the Finance Minister and FBR chairman are giving only verbal assurances. "We are not going to believe in verbal commitments but want written orders," he said adding the traders after October 31 would announce tougher decisions.